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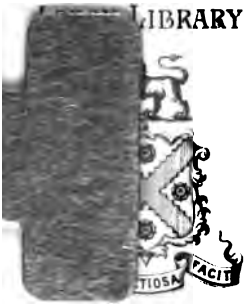

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OF

WILLIAM EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN

D. C. L.

AUTHOR OF 'LAYS OF THE SCOTTISH CAVALIERS,' ETC. ETC.

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MEMOIR

OF

WILLIAM EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN.

CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY AND PARENTAGE—HIS MOTHER—HIS BIRTH—EARLY CHARACTER AND TASTES—FAIRY LORE AND ITS CHARMS—COUNTRY LIFE—EARLY TASTE FOR READING—SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LIFE—HIS FAVOURITE CLASSICS—TASTE FOR BELLES LETTRES, AND DISTASTE FOR METAPHYSICS—AMUSEMENTS IN CHEMISTRY, AND THEIR RESULT—HOLIDAY RAMBLES—A TRIP TO ORKNEY.

WILLIAM EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN was not the first poet of his race. Sir Robert Ayton, a scion of the same house, a scholar and a poet, of whose regard Ben Jonson was proud,* and whose critical judgment was consulted by Hobbes of Malmesbury,† is buried in

* He told Drummond of Hawthornden that "Sir R. Aiton loved him dearly." — Notes of his conversations with Drummond, published for Shakespeare Society, p. 11.

† "He was a great acquaintance of Mr Thomas Hobbes of Malmsbury, whom, Mr Hobbes told me, he made use of (together with Ben Jonson) for an Aristarchus, when he made his epistle dedicatory for his translation of Thucydides."—Aubrey, 'Lives of Eminent Men, vol. ii. p. 200, edit. 1813.

Westminster Abbey, where his monument may be seen in the south aisle of the choir, between Poet's Corner and the entrance to Henry VII.'s Chapel. This gentleman, a cadet of the Fife branch of the ancient family of Ayton of Ayton, in Berwickshire, was born at the Castle of Kinaldie, in Fifeshire, in 1570. He followed James VI. to England, was attached to the court as private secretary in succession to the Queens Anne and Mary, and died unmarried at the palace of Whitehall in March 1638. The fine bust upon his monument, which recalls the features of the subject of this memoir in the lines of the forehead and mouth, and the massive curve of the lower jaw, indicates a man of handsome presence and keen intellect. Aubrey says of him that he was "acquainted with all the wits in England," and he took rank with them by right both of very various learning and of considerable powers as a writer of both Latin and English verses. Some of his poems still keep their place in literature. Burns altered one of them, without improving it, into the song, "I do confess that thou art fair;" and from another, beginning,

> "Should old acquaintance be forgot,
> And never thought upon,"

he took the idea of the song, which is, of all songs, especially dear to Scotchmen.

The common progenitor of Sir Robert and William Edmondstoune Aytoun was Sir Andrew Ayton, who was governor of Stirling Castle, and sheriff of Elgin and Forres, in 1500. For good and faithful service he received from the Crown grants of land in Fifeshire.

He had three sons, but their families have all died out, with the exception of the second son's, which is now represented by Mr Roger Sinclair Aytoun of Inchdairnie. Of this family William Edmondstoune Aytoun was a cadet—his grandfather William, after whom he was named, being the second son of the seventh laird of Inchdairnie. Through his grandmother Isobel, only child of Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Edmondstoune of the Coldstream Guards, he represented the eldest branch of the Edmondstounes, formerly of Edmondstoune and Ednam, and latterly of Corehouse; and he was heir of line to the estate of Corehouse, famous, among its many beauties, for the Falls of Clyde. His right to this estate was defeated by the will, made when she was nearly one hundred years old, of the last Miss Edmondstoune of Ednam, to the great disappointment, it need scarcely be said, of Aytoun's family.

His father, Roger Aytoun, was a partner of the firm of Youngs, Aytoun, and Rutherford, one of the leading firms of Writers to the Signet in Edinburgh. He was not only an excellent man of business, but also possessed of wide general information, and animated by a lively sympathy for science, literature, and art. His disposition was in an unusual degree benevolent and kindly—too kindly, it is said, and trustful, for his worldly interests; and in politics he was a Whig of the old school, of which his friends, Sir James Gibson-Craig, Jeffrey, and Cockburn, are now chiefly remembered as the leaders. But it was from his mother that Aytoun, like most eminent men, inherited his distinctive quali-

ties. From her, at least, he took his bias in both literature and politics—his Jacobite sympathies and his passion for ballad poetry. This lady, whose maiden name was Joan Keir, was the youngest daughter of James Francis Edward Keir of Kinmonth and West Rhynd, in Perthshire, and of Margaret Orme of Balvaird, in Fifeshire. She was, in many respects, a remarkable person. When young, she was very handsome, and she retained all the traces of beauty in old age. To marked originality of character she added superior culture. Early left an orphan, her youth was spent with her grand-uncle, Mr Alexander Keith of Ravelstone, who had adopted her. She was in the habit of reading to him works of a kind far beyond the usual range of a young girl's studies; and having a very retentive memory, her mind was well stored with the treasures both of poetry and prose. Mrs Keith was the grand-aunt of Walter Scott, who was a constant visitor at Ravelstone. His sister, Anne Scott, was Miss Keir's earliest and most intimate friend, and she saw much of Scott himself at Ravelstone when a boy. Some of the anecdotes of his youthful days, which are recorded in Lockhart's life of the poet, were supplied by Mrs Aytoun; but so sensitive was she about appearing in any public way, that she would not allow her name to be attached to them. She was herself a stanch Jacobite; and some of her kindred had been out both in the '15 and the '45. From old aunts and other relatives who had been involved in the troubles of the latter period, she had gathered innumerable stories of

romantic interest, which she both told and wrote with great spirit. It was from her that her son took his love of the White Rose. From her, too, he imbibed, as Burns did from the recitations of his mother, his deep devotion to the ballad poetry of Scotland. Indeed, in respect of minstrel lore, she would, like the Eppie Osett of 'Norman Sinclair,'* "have put Ritson and Leyden to shame. She could not only repeat such fine historical ballads as 'The Battle of Otterburn' and 'Sir Patrick Spens,' but she knew by heart most of the beautiful romantic ditties current on the Border, and she gave them forth with an animation and pathos that produced the strongest effect upon her audience." To the last Mrs Aytoun retained this faculty; and in 1857, when her son was preparing his edition of the 'Ballads of Scotland,' he would come to her for help when he found himself at a loss to fill up some hiatus, or staggered by some false reading, and she was pretty sure to supply the right reading or the missing verse. Add to the qualities already named a high, chivalrous spirit, and a piety which chastened but never chilled her vivacity and cheerfulness, and it will be seen how fortunate was the son of such a mother, and for how much of what was best in him he must have been indebted to her influence.

Aytoun was born at 21 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh, on the 21st June 1813. He was an only son,

* 'Norman Sinclair.' By W. Edmondstoune Aytoun. 3 vols. Blackwood and Sons, 1851. This novel, as I shall have occasion afterwards to show, was, in many of its details, founded on incidents in Aytoun's own life.

but had two sisters, both of whom survive him. As a child he was quick, intelligent, hot in temper, but easily restored to good-humour. He was also very fond of fun, being, as Erasmus says of Sir Thomas More, "from a child so delighted with humour, that he seemed even born for it." A picture of him, when four years old, at his father's side, by John Watson Gordon, shows his little deep-set eyes twinkling with humour, and a well-defined mouth, highly expressive of good-nature. His imagination was, from the first, lively; and the legends current in every Scottish nursery in those days took a strong hold upon him. Half in earnest, half in sport, as was his wont, he gives, in the following passage,* a sketch of the kind of lore on which the wondering ears of children used to be fed, which is valuable as indicating how it acted upon an imaginative nature like his own:—

We were born and bred long before Peter Parley had superseded the Fairy Tales, and poisoned the budding faculties of the infancy of these realms with his philosophical nonsense, and his endless editions of 'Copernicus made Easy.' Our nurserymaid, a hizzie from the Upper Ward of Lanarkshire, was a confirmed and noted believer in dreams, omens, tatie-bogles, and sundry other kinds of apparitions. Her mother was, we believe, the most noted spae-wife of the district; and it was popularly understood that she had escaped at least three times, in semblance of an enormous hare, from the pursuit of the Laird of Lockhart's grews. Such at least was the explanation which Lizzy Lindsay gave, before being admitted as an inmate of our household, of the malignant persecution which doomed her for three consecutive Sundays to a

* See his paper on "Mesmeric Mountebanks," in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for August 1846.

rather isolated but prominent seat in the kirk of Dolphington parish; nor did our worthy Lady-mother see any reason to doubt the accuracy of the statement. For was it not most natural that the daughter, however comely—and Lizzy was as strapping a lass as ever danced at a kirn—of a woman who had the evil reputation of divining surreptitious fortunes by means of the sediment of a tea-cup—of prophesying future sweethearts in exchange for hoarded sixpences—and of milking dry her neighbours' cows by aid of cantrips and an enchanted hair-rope;—was it not most natural, we say, that the daughter of the witch should have been looked upon with a suspicious eye by the minister, who used annually to preach four sermons in vituperation of Her of Endor, and by the elders, whose forefathers had turned out doggedly for the Covenant, and among whom still circulated strange and fantastic tales of bodily apparitions of the Evil One to the fugitives in the muir and the wilderness—of hideous shapes, which disturbed the gathered conventicle by the sides of the lonely burn—of spells, which made the buff-coats of their adversaries impenetrable as adamant to leaden bullet or the sweep of the Cameronian steel?

Upon these testimonials, and a strong affidavit from Lizzy, that in every other earthly matter she was innocent of the slightest peccadillo, the Lily of Lanark was installed as mistress and governante of the nursery. We were then in the days of teething, and sorely tormented with our gums, which neither for knob of poker, nor handle of kitchen-fork—the ancient Caledonian corals—would surrender their budding ornaments. We believe, therefore, that Lizzy Lindsay erred not materially from the path of truth when she signalised us as "the maist fractious bairn that ever broke a woman's heart." Night and day did we yell, with Satanic energy, from the excruciating molar pain; and little sympathy did our tears awaken in our pillow, as we lay in fevered anguish on the exuberant bosom of our guardian. Fortunately for us, in these days Daffy's Elixir was a thing unknown, else no doubt we should have received an early introduction to dram-drinking by means of the soft carminative. The fertile genius of Lizzy suggested a better spell for allaying our infant sorrows. Whenever we indulged in a more than ordinary implacable fit of

screeching, she threatened us with the apparition of "the Booman," a hideous spectre which was then supposed to perambulate the nurseries in the shape of Napoleon Buonaparte. In a very short while, no Saracen child ever became dumber when threatened by its mother with a visit from the Melech-Ric, than we did at the proposed coming of the dark and sanguinary phantom. For many years afterwards we believed as sincerely in the existence of this anthropophagus as in our own, and very nearly became a Bauldy for life, from having been surprised on one occasion, whilst surreptitiously investigating the contents of a jam-pot, by the descent of a climbing-boy into the nursery, and the terrors of his telegraphic boo! As we grew up, our nascent intellect received still more supernatural services from the legendary lore of Lizzy. She taught us the occult and mysterious meaning of those singular soot-flakes which wave upon the ribs of a remarkably ill-pokered fire—the dark significance which may be drawn from the spluttering and cabbaging of a candle—and the misfortunes sure to follow the mismanagement of the sacred salt. Often, too, her talk was of the boding death-watch—the owl which flapped its wings at the window of the dying—and the White Dove that flitted noiselessly from the room at the fearful, and then to us incomprehensible, moment of dissolution. As Hallowe'en approached, she told us of the mystic hempseed, of the figure which stalked behind the enterprising navigator of the stacks, and that awful detention of the worsted clue, which has made the heart of many a rustic maiden leap hurriedly towards her throat, when in the dead of night, and beneath the influence of a waning moon, she has dared to pry into the secrets of futurity, and, lover-seeking, has dropped the ball into the chasm of the deserted kiln.

Such being the groundwork of our mystic education, it is little wonder that we turned our novel knowledge of the alphabet to account by pouncing with intense eagerness upon every work of supernatural fiction upon which we possibly could lay our hands. We speak not now of Jack the Giant-killer, of the aspiring hero of the Beanstalk, or the appropriator of the Seven-leagued Boots. These were well enough in their way, but not, in our diseased opinion, sufficiently practical. We liked the fairies better. For

many a day we indulged in the hope that we might yet become possessed of a pot of that miraculous unguent, which, when applied to the eye, has the virtue of disclosing the whole secrets of the Invisible World. We looked with a kind of holy awe upon the emerald rings of the greensward, and would have given worlds to be present at the hour when the sloping side of the mountain is opened, and from a great ball, all sparkling with a thousand prismatic stalactites, ride forth, to the sound of flute and recorder, the squadrons of the Elfin Chivalry. Well do we remember the thrill of horror which pervaded our being when we first read of the Great Spectre of Glenmore, the Headless Fiend that haunts the black solitudes of the Rothiemurchus Forest, whom to see is madness, and to meet is inexorable death! Much did we acquire in these days of the natural history of Wraiths and Corpse-candles—of Phantom Funerals encountered on their way to the kirkyard by some belated peasant, who, marvelling at the strange array at such an hour, turns aside to let the grim procession pass, and beholds the visionary mourners—his own friends—sweep past, without sound of footfall or glance of recognition, bearing upon their shoulders a melancholy burden, wherein, he knows, is stretched the wan Eidolon of himself! No wonder that he takes to his bed that night, nor leaves it until the final journey.

Not for worlds would we have left the Grange House, which was then our summer residence, after nightfall, and, skirting the hill by the old deserted burial-ground, venture down the little glen, gloomy with the shade of hazels—cross the burn by the bridge above the Caldron pool—and finally gaze upon the loch all tranquil in the glory of the stars! Not all the fish that ever struggled on a night-line—and there were prime two-pounders, and no end of eels, in the loch—would have tempted us to so terrible a journey. For just below the bridge, where the rocks shot down precipitously into the black water, and the big patches of foam went slowly whirling round—there, we say, in some hideous den, heaven knows how deep, lurked the hateful Water-Kelpy, whose yell might be heard, during a spate, above the roar of the thundering stream, and who, if he did not lure and drown the cat-witted tailor of the district, was, to say the least of it, the

most maligned and slandered individual of his race. Even in broad day we never liked that place. It had a mischievous and uncanny look; nor could you entirely divest yourself of the idea that there was something at the bottom of the pool. Bad as was the burn, the loch was a great deal worse. For here, at no very remote period, the fiend had emerged from its depths in the shape of a black steed, gentle and mild-eyed to look upon, and pacing up to three children, not ten minutes before dismissed from the thraldom of the dominie, had mutely but irresistibly volunteered the accommodation of an extempore ride. And so, stepping on with his burden across the gowans—which never grew more, and never will grow, where the infernal hoof was planted—the demon horse arrived at the margin of the loch where the bank is broken and the water deep, and with a neigh of triumph bounded in, nor from that day to this were the bodies of the victims found. Moreover, yonder at the stunted thorn-trees is the spot where poor Mary Walker drowned herself and her innocent and unchristened bairn; and they say that, at midnight when all is quiet, you will hear the wailing of a female voice, as if the spirit of the murdered infant were bewailing its lost estate; and that a white figure may be seen wringing its hands in agony, as it flits backwards and forwards along the range of the solitary loch. Therefore, though the black beetle is an irresistible bait, we never threw a fly at night on the surface of the Haunted Tarn.

Aytoun had the good fortune to see much of the country in his childhood. His father possessed the estate of Murieston, a property of about 200 acres, fourteen miles west of Edinburgh. At that time, with its young plantations, which had been for the most part laid out by Mr Aytoun, it was barren and unpicturesque enough. But it was country; and to a town-bred child all country scenery, be it ever so bare or tame, is full of beauty and charm. Besides, it had its own "burn," where the boy, still under

the nurse's tutelage, fished up minnows in his little tin pannikin (*Scoticè*, tinnie), and caught his first impulse towards a sport to which he owed many of the pleasantest hours of his life. There, to use his own words, it was "that I first became conscious of the beauty of external nature; when I plucked the gowan, and purple thyme, and yellow crowfoot from the mountain-sward, and with my comrades plaited caps from the rushes that grew in the bonny meadow where the lapwings had their nests." There he began to note the sights and sounds of a country life, in describing which his heart was ever warm and his pen ever graphic: there, too, he first learned to handle his gun, and acquired the steadiness of hand and eye which served him well in after years on moorland and correi.

His love of reading was very early shown, and a book was his constant companion. When about the age of nine or ten he would stretch himself, with a volume of the Scott novels, on the hearthrug, face downwards, for hours, and shout and scream with delight over the humour of the characters. His reading was very apt to take a direction of which his mother did not altogether approve. 'The Devil on Two Sticks,' or 'Humphrey Clinker,' surreptitiously taken from his father's library, were just the books which his keen sense of humour was sure to find especially attractive, to the prejudice of graver studies; and he had often to do battle to save them from being thrown by her into the fire. In these struggles, however, the boy was pretty

sure to be victorious. Nature and only sons will have their way; and boys of Aytoun's stamp are pretty sure to be left in the end to that "fine confused feeding" for which a young healthy brain and heart like his are never the worse. After two or three years of preliminary training under a private tutor, he was sent, at the age of eleven, to the Edinburgh Academy, then under the rectorship of Archdeacon Williams, an able scholar and excellent master. Aytoun, though he took no lead in Latin and Greek, held a good place in his class.* His natural love of fun and exuberant animal spirits were constantly expending themselves in squibs and humorous sketches of the subordinates in the Academy, and of such other local characters as came in his way. To the classics he seems to have given only such attention as enabled him to keep a position well up among the knot of clever young men who headed the class to which he belonged. Nor was this wonderful. The system which then prevailed, by which the extent of ground to be got over in the books studied was regulated by the laggard pace of the dullest boys in a very numerous class, could scarcely fail to destroy all eager relish for Ovid, Horace, or Euripides in a boy like Aytoun, of more than

* Aytoun was a favourite with Archdeacon Williams, who predicted a brilliant future for him. Often in the spring holidays the Archdeacon accompanied him to Murieston, where the distinction of master and pupil was laid aside, and they became rivals in the art of angling. The Archdeacon, himself a humorist, entered with zest into Aytoun's frolicsome ways; and his wrath at lessons slighted, or at some boyish escapade, was not unfrequently averted, when they got back to school, by some irresistible bit of drollery on the part of his pupil.

average capacity, backed by fine animal spirits and a vigorous imagination. Later in life he felt keenly what he had lost for want of that thorough grounding in the classics which, under a better system, might have been easily acquired in much less time than he had nominally spent over them at school; a want which after-studies, however energetically pursued—and they were so in his case—are never able wholly to repair. Aytoun, however, while at the Academy, took various prizes for English verse; but his prize-poems which I have seen are—what such things usually are—echoes, not unskilful certainly, of other men, but without any characteristic merits of their own.

From the Academy Aytoun went to the Edinburgh University to complete his classical studies under Professors Pillans and Dunbar. To the former of these, Aytoun, in common with all who were capable of appreciating the admirable skill with which Professor Pillans vitalised the study of ancient literature and life and manners, owed the best part of his knowledge of the classics. This debt he acknowledged in an address to the graduates of the Edinburgh University on 23d April 1863, in words which express not too warmly what most of the old pupils of Professor Pillans have felt:—

Perhaps it may be permitted to me to recall the time when I daily took my seat on the same benches which, throughout the bygone session, I have seen thronged with eager and intelligent faces, and when I listened to the prelections of my now venerable colleague. I had already been engaged in studying the mechanism of the Latin language, but of the literature itself, its extent,

range, and value, I knew comparatively little. I could, indeed, construct sentences with tolerable accuracy; convert a few lines of English into Latin, by aid of the dictionary, without more than the usual share of blunders; and, with the assistance of the *Gradus ad Parnassum*, fabricate hexameters, which, if not harmonious, were at least in reasonable accordance with the laws of quantity and metre. But I had been kept so long working at the wards of the lock, that I took little thought of the treasures contained in the inner chamber. Perpetual repetition of conjugations and derivatives had dulled my perception of beauty: and instead of admiring the thought that glowed within an ode of Horace, I had been taught only to study the words and regard them as a grammatical exercise. It was as if a marble statue by Praxiteles had been given to a roadside labourer to hammer down into fragments. Had I tarried at that point—as I have reason to think is unfortunately the case with many—I am afraid that in later years my literary instincts would have decayed. But presently I found, under the teaching of Professor Pillans, that the scales were falling from my eyes. I began to see, in their real beauty and majesty, the glorious creations of the past. Not the letter only, but the spirit was now revealed to us; the intellect was stirred, the imagination was excited, and what had once been dreary task-work now became an occupation of transcendent interest and delight. I well remember how, without withdrawing our attention from the stated labour of the class, or the humble study of the author with whose writings we were more especially engaged, the Professor gave us glimpses, from time to time, of other poets and sages, whose very names had till then scarcely reached our ears—how he set before us an outline of Roman literature, from its rise under Ennius to its culminating point in the grand Augustan era; and farther on through the periods illustrated by Lucan, Martial, and Juvenal, until the latest strains of the classical muse were heard from the lips of Claudian. Such tuition was of exceeding value, not only for the information it conveyed, but for the keen desire of further knowledge which it inspired, and the literary ambition which it roused. It prepared our minds and sharpened our apprehension for the studies next in order; for those were famous days in our

university, and great men dwelt among us. There was Wilson, whose magnificent eloquence, passionate and thrilling as the utterances of the Æolian harp, entranced the listener. There was Hamilton, the subtle metaphysician; Leslie, the deep philosopher; Hope, the accomplished chemist; and others of mark and eminence, instructors and almost idols of the rising generation, all then in the full maturity of their powers.

The then Greek professor had not the happy gifts of Professor Pillans as a teacher, and hence probably it was that Aytoun at this period made comparatively little progress in Greek. What he knew of it was chiefly acquired some years afterwards. Towards Homer, indeed, he was attracted from an early date. The first and greatest of all minstrels had irresistible attractions for the boy whose childhood had been nurtured on the ballad lore of Scotland and the picturesque splendours of Scott. "Homer" was the name of one of his earliest published poems, and allusions are constantly recurring in his writing to the characters and incidents of the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey.' Next to Homer, Virgil was his favourite among the poets of antiquity, and after him Ovid. His lectures on these were the best of the classical series. Passages from both were familiar on his lips, and he executed more than one translation from Ovid of unusual excellence. To exact scholarship Aytoun made no pretension; that demands a special faculty and a special training. The first of these Aytoun had not, and in Edinburgh at that period the latter was scarcely to be obtained. But, indeed, he set little store at any time of his life by the niceties of scholarship, thinking that for most men it was enough to acquire

such a general mastery of the classical languages as to be able to read them with ease. He fully appreciated the value of the masterpieces of antiquity as models of style, and as landmarks in the history of human thought; but he was little inclined to cultivate their study to the neglect of modern literature and history, with their wider aims and more immediate interests.

While at the University he attended the lectures of Professor Wilson on moral philosophy, of Sir W. Hamilton on history, of Dr Ritchie on logic and metaphysics, of Professor Jameson on natural history, and of Dr Hope on chemistry—besides going through the special studies required for the legal profession, to which he was destined.

His reading at this period must have been varied and extensive. It is true he had not the reputation among his companions of being a reading man. Full of health and fine animal spirits, fond of field-sports and the country, fond also of society, and shining in it by his quick sense of humour and ready command of language, he was seen so much among his friends, and seemed to take his studies so easily, that his persevering pursuit of literary attainment was little surmised. But it was unquestionably at this time that he began to feel that literature was his true vocation, and that he set himself earnestly but silently, as his manner was, to prepare himself for it. Meanwhile he wrote much in verse. At this period Pope and Dryden seem to have been the models of his graver style. His natural bent found a happier outlet in innumerable

squibs and ballads, which made him a name among his fellow-students as a man likely in time to do honour to the University.

I have no doubt that Aytoun described himself in the following passage of 'Norman Sinclair,' especially in the distaste for mathematics and metaphysics which he ascribes to his hero—underrating, at the same time, his own attainments, as in his later years he was apt to do:—

Like most Scottish students of the time, I acquired a good knowledge of Latin, a smattering of Greek, and a considerable stock of general information, increased by private reading of a desultory kind, which was of far more use to me afterwards than anything I learned in the schools. My uncle's library was but a poor one; but in it I found the plays of Shakespeare, Anderson's edition of the British Poets, the works of the elder novelists, and the histories of Hume and Gibbon. These I perused with absorbing interest, to the neglect, I must confess, of the mathematical and metaphysical treatises which ought to have engrossed my attention; but on that account I cannot truthfully say that I have any tears to shed. I never took kindly to mathematics; partly because the practical use of that study was not explained to me, and partly because I could see nothing in it to interest the imagination. Metaphysics I detested. The science appeared to me an elaborate diabolical invention for mystifying what was clear, and confounding what was intelligible; it muddled the intellect without refining the understanding; and the peculiar jargon in which it was couched seemed to me destructive of the purity of the English language. I do not say that such is my opinion now, but I feel no shame in avowing my earlier impressions; and, judging from certain metaphysical discourses which I have heard delivered from the pulpit by gentlemen fresh from college, I have serious doubts as to the fitness of the style for edification and improvement.

Chemistry appears for a time to have engaged his

attention, as it does that of most clever boys. His researches in that science were prosecuted in concert with his friend David (now Sir David) Monro, son of Dr Alexander Monro, the then Professor of Anatomy at the Edinburgh University; but they were brought to a premature close by the accident on which the following passage of 'Norman Sinclair' is founded:—

In chemistry I made some progress, and would have made more, but for the occurrence of an accident which fairly cured me of the passion for experiment. It so happened that at college I had an especial chum, Willie Menelaws, with whom I was inseparably leagued. Whether in mischief or in study we went together; and bore each other's burdens, though these were not very heavy, with a fidelity that might have done honour to Damon and Pythias. Willie never hesitated to accept responsibility for my literary squibs, which sometimes excited the wrath of the students against whom they were directed; and I, in return, stood between him and the parental anger in the matter of certain abstracted bell-pulls which had given rise to a serious outcry. We both commenced the study of chemistry with great zeal, and went through the preliminary stages of fabricating coal-gas in tobacco-pipes; destroying silver spoons by rubbing them with mercury, which metal we obtained by smashing an ancient barometer; and smearing the walls with phosphorus—an operation which very nearly deprived the unfortunate Peggy M'Craw of her wits. Then, in the hope of seducing the lightning from the clouds, we constructed a kite with a wire in the string, after the manner of Franklin, but somehow it would not fly; and we tried to make caustic, by steeping a shilling in nitric acid, the result of which was, that our fingers became as black as the claws of an ourang-outang. It was God's mercy that we did not get the length of fulminating powder, else assuredly we should have been blown to smithereens. That consummation, however, we were very near attaining otherwise, and it took place after this fashion.

I had discovered in an attic some old-fashioned apparatus which my uncle had laid aside—troughs, jars, siphons, and suchlike,

which I regarded as an inestimable treasure; and these were forthwith removed to a room on the ground-floor which I occupied as a kind of study. We had previously tried our hands at making oxygen gas, but had failed for lack of implements. We now determined to essay the production of hydrogen, and having procured the necessary materials, we arranged our whole stock of glass, so that the gas from the retort might, after passing through various receptacles, be at last lodged in a huge bell-shaped jar, surmounted by a brass stop-cock, which was the pride of our collection. Nothing could have succeeded better. The gas was generated, bubbled up through the water, and very soon reached the jar, as we soon discovered by the nauseous odour of its escape.

"Now then, Willie," said I, "suppose we apply a light, and see how it burns."

We did so; and a pale-blue jet whizzed up, upon which we gazed with the delight of a couple of Ghebers; but our adoration was uncommonly brief, for a minute could hardly have elapsed before the flame waxed dim, buzzed like an infuriated wasp, descended into the jar, and a tremendous explosion followed, which dashed both of us to the ground.

"Willie, man!" said I, recovering myself so far as to sit upon my rump, and extracting a piece of glass from my cheek, which bled profusely—"Willie man! are ye killed?"

"No, I don't think I am," said Willie, scrambling to his feet; "but Lord's-sake, Norman, bear a hand with the water-jug! Fling it over me—fling it over my legs; for the acid has burned through my breeches, and I feel it biting in my flesh!"

"O Willie, what am I to do? The jug's empty!"

"Take me out to the pump! take me out to the pump!" roared Willie, "or I'll be as raw as a skinned rabbit!"

"His presence be wi' us! What's this o't, lads?" cried Nurse Osett, rushing into the room, greatly alarmed, as she might well be, for the explosion was violent enough to shatter several of the window-panes; "surely ye've no been trying to raise the deevil?"

"The pump! the pump!" screamed Willie; and accordingly we conveyed him thither, where copious libations diluted the acid, and saved my friend from serious consequences, though it was a month and more before he could walk to lecture, without betray-

ing, by an absurd waddle, the temporary loss of his cuticle. On investigating the apartment, we found that we had great reason to be thankful for our escape with so little damage. The brass stop-cock had been driven an inch and a half into the plaster of the wall, in a direction which showed that it must have passed close by the head of my companion; the carpet, fortunately not a new one, was utterly destroyed; and an old hat that hung upon a peg was cut through by splinters of the apparatus, as clean as could have been effected by the bursting of a hand-grenade.

His friend Sir David Monro, writing to Aytoun from New Zealand in March 1861, when the number of 'Blackwood' with this portion of 'Norman Sinclair' in it had just reached him, says:—

There is a story told of Sinclair and Willie Menelaws proceeding to the fabrication of hydrogen gas so exceedingly like an event that once happened to myself, when in company with a school and college friend called William Aytoun, that I could only come to the conclusion that it was an exercise of the inventive faculty, bearing, by some strange chance, a most remarkable resemblance to an event which had actually occurred, or that the writer of 'Norman Sinclair' must have been present on the occasion. What do you say to it? The descriptions of the flame waxing dim, and buzzing like an infuriated wasp before the explosion, and the brass stop-cock driven against the plaster of the wall, out of which it knocked a good hole, bring the whole scene before my eyes again as plainly as if it had happened yesterday, and are strictly in accordance with historical truth. But I don't altogether recollect Willie Menelaws, that is, supposing the aforesaid Menelaws to be me, being carried to the pump with the acid biting into his extremities. That addition is, I suppose, of the nature of what Sir W. Scott used to call putting a cocked-hat and walking-stick to a story.

Of Aytoun's busy and happy life at this period, not the least pleasant, nor the least important in their influence on his character, were the hours spent in his

holiday rambles. "He liked nothing better," writes his sister, "than starting off for a few days in spring to some Highland loch, with his fishing-rod and a book, revelling in the grand scenery, for he had all the elements of a painter in him, and sketched and etched cleverly as a boy, though he did not pursue the art." What these excursions were to him may be seen from the following passage:—

When summer came—for in Scotland, alas! there is no spring, winter rolling itself remorselessly, like a huge polar bear, over what should be the beds of the early flowers, and crushing them ere they are developed—when summer came, and the trees put on their pale-green liveries, and the brakes were blue with the wood-hyacinth, and the ferns unfolded their curl, what ecstasy it was to steal an occasional holiday, and wander, rod in hand, by some quiet stream up in the moorlands, inhaling health from every breeze, nor seeking shelter from the gentle shower as it dropped its manna from the heavens! And then the long holidays, when the town was utterly deserted—how I enjoyed these, as they can only be enjoyed by the possessors of the double talisman of strength and youth! No more care—no more trouble—no more task-work—no thought even of the graver themes suggested by my later studies! Look—standing on the Calton Hill, behold yon blue range of mountains to the west—cannot you name each far pinnacle from its form? Benledi, Benvoirlich, Benlomond! O the beautiful land, the elysium that lies round the base of those distant giants! The forest of Glenfinlas, Loch Achray with its weeping birches, the grand defiles of the Trosachs, and Ellen's Isle, the pearl of the one lake that genius has for ever hallowed! Up, sluggard! Place your knapsack on your back; but stow it not with unnecessary gear, for you have still further to go, and your rod also must be your companion, if you mean to penetrate the region beyond. Money? Little money suffices him who travels on foot, who can bring his own fare to the shepherd's bothy where he is to sleep, and who sleeps

there better and sounder than the tourist who rolls from station to station in his barouche, grumbling because the hotels are overcrowded, and miserable about the airing of his sheets. Money? You would laugh if you heard me mention the sum which has sufficed for my expenditure during a long summer month; for the pedestrian, humble though he be, has his own especial privileges, and not the least of these is that he is exempted from all extortion. Donald—God bless him!—has a knack of putting on the prices; and when an English family comes posting up to the door of his inn, clamorously demanding every sort of accommodation which a metropolitan hotel could afford, grumbling at the lack of attendance, sneering at the quality of the food, and turning the whole establishment upside down for their own selfish gratification, he not unreasonably determines that the extra trouble shall be paid for in that gold which rarely crosses his fingers except during the short season when tourists and sportsmen abound. But Donald, who is descended from the M'Gregor, does not make spoil of the poor. The sketcher or the angler who come to his door, with the sweat upon their brow, and the dust of the highway or the pollen of the heather on their feet, meet with a hearty welcome; and though the room in which their meals are served is but low in the roof, and the floor strewn with sand, and the attic wherein they lie is garnished with two beds and a shake-down, yet are the viands wholesome, the sheets clean, and the tariff so undeniably moderate that even parsimony cannot complain. So up in the morning early, so soon as the first beams of the sun slant into the chamber—down to the loch or river, and with a headlong plunge scrape acquaintance with the pebbles at the bottom; then rising with a hearty gasp, strike out for the islet or the further bank, to the astonishment of the otter, who, thief that he is, is skulking back to his hole below the old saugh-tree, from a midnight foray up the burns. Huzza! The mallard, dozing among the reeds, has taken fright, and, tucking up his legs under his round fat rump, flies quacking to a remoter marsh.

> "By the pricking of my thumbs,
> Something wicked this way comes,"

and lo! Dugald the keeper, on his way to the hill, is arrested by the aquatic phenomenon, and half believes that he is witnessing the frolics of an Urisk! Then make your toilet on the greensward, swing your knapsack over your shoulders, and cover ten good miles of road before you halt for breakfast with more than the appetite of an ogre.

In this way I made the circuit of wellnigh the whole of the Scottish Highlands, penetrating as far as Cape Wrath and the wild district of Edderachylis, nor leaving unvisited the grand scenery of Loch Corruisk, and the stormy peaks of Skye; and more than one delightful week did I spend each summer, exploring Gameshope, or the Linns of Talla, where the Covenanters of old held their gathering; or clambering up the steep ascent by the Grey Mare's Tail to lonely and lovely Loch Skene, or casting for trout in the silver waters of St Mary's.—'Norman Sinclair,' chap. viii.

In a letter to Aytoun's sister from New Zealand, dated Nov. 3, 1866, his friend Sir David Monro gives the following pleasant account of one of these sporting rambles, made, curiously enough, among the remote regions of which Aytoun was afterwards to be the sheriff:—

I think it was in the year 1834 or '35 that I had a sporting excursion with your brother William. We put ourselves on board a steamer bound for Kirkwall, in the Orkney Islands, some time in the beginning of August; taking with us guns and dogs and other things necessary for the enjoyment of the sport to be had there. The steamer was a small and slow vessel, and much overcrowded. Among other passengers, the late Dr Traill, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence, was on board, on a visit to the land of his birth. He was a man of wonderful variety and extent of information, and of kindly and genial temper. Aytoun and myself were both astonished at the encyclopedia-like character of the man.

Going below was out of the question. The little cabin was crammed with big burly men, looking as if they might be in-

terested in black cattle or Wick herrings, but in the mean time earnest in their devotion to whisky-toddy. Dr Traill I recollect telling us that he always slept on the deck; so, after an examination of the most promising localities there, we selected a place not very far from the funnel, where we took up our quarters for the night. There was not much sleep, however. The deck proved harder than we supposed; and the constant noise and novelty of the position kept us awake nearly the whole of the night. We were two nights on board, but how we got over the second night I can't for the life of me recollect; I have an impression, however, that it was in some unromantic manner—in a dirty bunk, or something of the sort. Our appetite for camping out had been considerably modified by the first night's experience.

It was a beautiful autumn morning as we entered the Bay of Kirkwall; the sea perfectly calm and clear as crystal, the air deliciously fresh, and the scenery wild and captivating to the imagination of a sportsman. We lived at an inn at Kirkwall, where we were very comfortably lodged. Like the other houses of the quaint old town, it presented one end to the street; but it was a good substantial house, and the meals were ample and well cooked.

There was a large company in the house. The Sheriff of Orkney, Mr Maconochie, with one or two friends, was there; and very pleasant company we found them. In addition to these, there was, for a short time, a large concourse of commercial gentlemen, out of some of whom we extracted considerable amusement. The commercial gent was a creature that always amused your brother William very much, and occasionally violently stirred up his bile. The fact is, that there is a great diversity among commercial travellers. Some of them are as well conducted and modest men as you can meet with anywhere; but others of them, and a very considerable proportion, are just the reverse—vain, untruthful, and offensive in their manners, the most perfect types of the "gent" and snob.

These were the fellows that your brother used to speak of as the "sacciferi," and against whom some of the keenest shafts of his satire have been levelled.

We had in our inn specimens of all sorts, and ample opportunities of studying their characters and manners. There were two whom I particularly recollect. They remained behind after all the others were gone. One was a Jew Cockney, a remarkably good-natured fellow, who took a great fancy to us, and, to enjoy our company, would wait dinner for any length of time; the other was the representative of some hardware house in the High Street of Edinburgh, a hard-headed Presbyterian and Calvinist. These two used to have some exceedingly tough theological arguments, greatly to our amusement. The metal of the Calvinist being much the heavier, he would soon have settled his opponent, but we used occasionally to come to the relief of the Jew, and suggest doubts and difficulties, and point out flaws in the ironmonger's argument. In this way we kept the ball in play, and enjoyed the discussion greatly.

We remained about a fortnight at Kirkwall, shooting grouse, and occasionally boating and going in pursuit of seals, and eider-ducks and other wild-fowl. One night we spent at sea in a herring-boat. Unfortunately the take that night was not a good one, but we saw the whole process, and had a most interesting night of it. About three in the afternoon a whole fleet of boats used to put out from one of the harbours of Orkney; its name has escaped me, but it was near the house of a Mr Baikie, with whom we were staying, and from whom we received much hospitality and kindness. On board one of these boats we embarked; an open boat, with a small space decked in by the bows. The whole boat and everything about it was covered with scales of herrings. The crew consisted of five stalwart Orcadians, fine manly fellows, temperate, good-natured, and civil. With a soft summer's breeze we sailed past picturesque headlands and capes of the old red sandstone, alive with thousands of screaming gulls, cormorants, and northern sea-fowl of every variety. Occasionally the boat would be rounded up that we might get a shot, when any tempting specimen made us eager to secure it. As the sun got lower we left the coasts, and stood out into the open ocean. The night was deliciously mild, and the constant twilight of these northern regions never deserted us. One would have supposed it was a splendid night for fishing, and yet

when the nets were hauled in there were not above two or three hundred herring entangled in them. Disappointing as this was, more particularly to our hosts of the boat, it was, nevertheless, to us a most interesting sight. I recollect that we were astonished at the immense length of the net that was let down into the sea; and when it was drawn in, every individual fish, and every cord against which a fish had rubbed, glittered as if it were made of bright and luminous silver. We got back about seven in the morning, and went to bed and tried to sleep; but it wouldn't do. After a fair trial we both voted it a failure; and so, putting on our clothes and shouldering our guns, we marched back to Kirkwall. From Kirkwall we crossed the island to Stromness; but before leaving Kirkwall we sent our guns, dogs, and heavy baggage back to Edinburgh, taking with us nothing but fishing-rods, each carrying on his back a knapsack with a change of clothes, and a fishing-book well stored with flies, casting-lines, silk worm-gut, and the other necessaries of an angler. At Stromness we lodged with a Mrs Logan, where we found the claret and the cigars both of undeniable quality and extremely cheap; suggestive of commercial relations between the Orkneys and Bordeaux on the one hand and the West Indies on the other, unencumbered by those payments of customs duties which add so much to the cost of many of the good things of this life. Of course, while at Stromness we went and saw the Stones of Stennis—one of the most interesting things of the kind within the British dominions.

From Stromness we passed over to the island of Hoy; and when I look back upon our voyage across the straits, I wonder that we were not lost. We had a very small boat, with only one hand, and he not a professional sailor. At that time I had an idea that a sheet meant a sail, and your brother's knowledge of nautical matters was about equally accurate; so you can imagine what would happen upon our receiving an urgent command either to make fast or to let go the main-sheet. And yet we were expected to assist our sole Naucrates in working the boat—and had to do it too. We got into tides that ran like mill-sluices, and swept us along into all sorts of unexpected positions; and then again we found ourselves dancing about on the summit

of tide-rips, where the waves rose angrily all about us, and broke with hoarse and ominous noises into foam that threatened to curl into our cockle-shell and swamp us. At length, by God's providence, we landed safely on the coast of Hoy, and, shouldering our knapsacks, marched straight for the Dwarfie's Stone, of the whereabouts of which we had informed ourselves. This stone—of which, by the by, you will see an account in Sir W. Scott's 'Pirate'—lies in a desolate glen at the foot of the highest hill of the Orkneys—the Wart of Hoy. We both of us sat down and attempted a sketch of it, but rain was brewing. The atmosphere was calm and the day warm, and the consequence was that the midges settled down upon us whenever we remained still, in numbers which no one can appreciate till he has been in these northern latitudes. So, after examining the stone, with its short passage leading into it, and small cabin hollowed out on either side, and admiring the wildness and desolate grandeur of the whole scene, we marched on in a drenching rain for the terminus of our day's walk, the pilot's house, which stands, or stood, on a grassy plateau overlooking the Pentland Firth.

After a halt of two days here, during which we had an opportunity of seeing this celebrated Firth in its angry mood, and looking down over the precipice of 1200 feet with which the island of Hoy confronts the gigantic waves of the Northern Ocean that hurl themselves for ever against its base, we crossed over to Dunnet Head, and after a walk of a few miles found ourselves in Thurso. It had been part of our programme, before we left Edinburgh, that when in the Highlands we were to wear the kilt, more particularly when fishing; and with this view we had gone to a celebrated establishment somewhere near the Tron Church, where Highlandmen were made on the shortest notice, and had each of us provided ourselves with a kilt, and a "sporran," I think they call it. Finding that the Monro tartan rivalled in its tints the most gorgeous of the South American macaws, I made myself for the nonce a Macdonald of the sept of Clanranald. Aytoun had a green kilt, and was supposed to belong to some family of the Mackenzies.

Being now fairly landed on the mainland of Scotland, fishing-rods in our fists, and not very far from the theatre of our opera-

tions, it struck your brother that the time had arrived for donning the Celtic costume, and he informed me at tea that he intended to come out the following morning in the dress of the natives of the country. It was in vain that I endeavoured to persuade him that Thurso was not in the Highlands, and urged him to put it off until we got into the wilder regions to the westward. He evidently enjoyed the idea of the sensation he should produce, and had made up his mind to do the thing.

And I can assure you he did produce a sensation the following morning; for, in the first place, he put the kilt on wrong side foremost; but even when this was rectified, there was such an air of newness about the whole get-up, and his legs were so excessively white, that the waiter was obliged to retreat from the room with three parts of his napkin in his mouth; and when we emerged into the street after paying the bill, a mob of boys escorted us out of the town with loud cheers and other demonstrations of delight. Their hilarity was in no respect diminished by the fact of our having a fine breeze, as Jack would say, "right aft," before which we bowled along like stalwart pedestrians, our imaginations fired with the visions of the fish we were to take in the country of the Sutherlands and the Mackays.

And capital sport we had in those regions. We fished in the streams as we went along, all of them abounding in trout, salmon, and sea-trout. We stopped at Tongue, an extremely pretty place, and made excursions to the lochs of the neighbourhood, out of which we never failed to fill our creels. We stopped a night or two at Altnaharrow, where at that time there was not much to be got to eat, and the fleas were abundant. I recollect Aytoun in the morning complaining that he had been kept awake by the "shrill cicadas, people of the pine." We fished in Loch Shin and in the river Shin. We passed on by Bonar Bridge to Tain, and thence we trudged it in one day to Dingwall, passing through the country of the Monros, where Aytoun did not fail to chaff me upon the enthusiasm which he declared he saw glowing within me for the country of my forefathers. From Dingwall we went to Strathpeffer, and climbed up to the summit of Ben Wyvis, gathering, as we went, some snow out of a mass which, even at that season of the year, lay unmelted in a moun-

tain hollow. From Dingwall we went on to Inverness, and walked out to the field of Culloden; and at Inverness we parted for the time. Aytoun made his way home leisurely; but I recollect his telling me afterwards that he had had some good sport in Loch Awe, and that he had taken by trolling a "salmo ferox" weighing 15 lb.

CHAPTER II.

A STUDENTS' MEETING, AND HIS SPEECH THERE—EFFECTS OF THE REFORM EXCITEMENT ON HIM—PUBLICATION OF 'POLAND, AND OTHER POEMS'—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION—UNWILLINGNESS TO ADOPT THE LAW—RESIDENCE AND STUDIES IN GERMANY—TRANSLATION OF FAUST—FAUST THE MAGICIAN AND HIS CONJURING BOOK—MARLOWE'S FAUSTUS—LIFE AT ASCHAFFENBURG, AND LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER—SUNDAY ABROAD AND AT HOME—HIS TUTOR'S OPINION OF HIM—TRANSLATION OF THE BRIDE OF CORINTH—THE WANDERING JEW.

It was while Aytoun was still at college, to which I, who was some years his junior, had just gone, and somewhere about the year 1832, that I first saw him. The occasion was a public meeting of the students of the University, held to consider the propriety of establishing a students' prize for, as far as I can recollect, pre-eminence in general literature. On the platform were Mr James Moncreiff, Mr Campbell Swinton, Mr John Thomson Gordon, Mr Makgill, Mr Thomas Tod Stoddart, and others, who were then considered as the leading students at the university. Several of them spoke well, with a little too much, perhaps, of the false rhetorical glow which young men who speak like, and which young men who are not given to speaking very

much dislike. The manner was perhaps a little grandiose, with something of that] sublimely dictatorial tone which the leading set at all universities are apt to assume towards the common herd of students. These latter seemed to take meekly enough what the "*Dii majorum gentium*" had provided for them. At any rate, things were going smoothly towards carrying the desired resolutions, when a young man rose from the other end of the platform and asked permission to speak. His air was extremely youthful, almost boyish — his complexion clear and rosy — his hair light and crisp; but what most claimed observation was the play of humour about a full and good-natured mouth, and the merry inward light that danced in his small but expressive eyes. This young man was Aytoun. To the visible surprise of his friends on the platform, he took up a line of argument in direct opposition to that which they had been urging, and enforced it with the happiest humour and a flow of well-ordered language, the strength of which lay in the current of shrewd sense which pervaded it. So completely did he carry the meeting along with him, that the whole programme was disarranged, and it became apparent—what ultimately proved to be the fact—that whatever resolutions might be passed, the scheme of a students' prize would not be carried out. The details of the discussion have long since vanished from my mind, but the impression remains freshly as ever of the rare address and tact shown by the young orator in his line of argument, and of the ease and aptitude of the lan-

guage in which it was embodied. I have since heard that Aytoun's speaking as he did created no small surprise, if not indignation, among the promoters of the meeting, with whom he had acted in getting it up. To have their flank turned in this way by an ally was, of course, anything but pleasant. No doubt the idea of opposing his friends seized him on the moment. He had most likely never given any particular thought to the subject to be discussed until his friends began to speak. Then, very probably, some of their arguments had satisfied him they were wrong—no uncommon circumstance even with older speakers—and Aytoun was sincere enough and bold enough at all times to speak out his convictions. Or, what is still more probable, the magisterial airs of his friends had struck him as so ludicrous, that he was irresistibly tempted to try the effect of exploding a bombshell among them. The speech was obviously spontaneous and unstudied, but no stumbling or hesitation marred its effect, and it showed powers of no common kind in its rare combination of fluency and elegance without weakness, and of force without exaggeration.

Young as he was, Aytoun was no novice in the art of speaking, which he had practised, not only in the doubtful arena of the Speculative Society, but on the platform before excited crowds of hard-headed citizens. These were the exciting times of the Reform era, and he often spoke in public on the prevailing topics of that turbulent period. His father's firm were the solicitors and political agents of the Duke of Hamilton;

and Aytoun, who had become their articled clerk, was much engaged in the Lanarkshire election which immediately preceded the passing of the Reform Bill. This gave him a thorough insight into the machinery by which elections in that part of the country were carried, and which he afterwards laid bare with admirable humour in his paper, "How I Stood for the Dreepdaily Burghs." It also cured him of any tendency he might ever have had towards Radicalism, by showing him the extreme perils of the revolutionary agitation resorted to by the party with whom he was then acting. In the course of that election he had an experience, which he never forgot, of what mobs are, and of the consequences of calling into play the mere force of numbers. The chapters in 'Norman Sinclair' devoted to the Slockendrouth Election describe scenes which he actually saw at Hamilton upon this occasion; and nowhere will be found a more stirring picture of the excited state of men's minds in Scotland at this period, or a more salutary warning against the renewal of an agitation tending to such hazardous results.

Aytoun had taken a deep interest in the cause of the Poles, many of whom, including Prince Czartoryski, had taken refuge in Edinburgh, and were frequent visitors at his father's house. His views and feelings on the Polish question took shape in a poem, which he published in 1832, entitled, 'Poland, Homer, and other Poems.' On a copy of it which he gave me—most reluctantly—in 1844, he inscribed: "To Theodore

Martin, with tears and penitence. William E. Aytoun. *O mihi præteritos referet si Jupiter annos!*" But though he had come so early to judge them with severity, those poems do no discredit to a young man of seventeen—his age when they were written. They have the quality, characteristic of his later writing, of a fulness and sweetness of rhythm by no means common in so young a writer.

In 1833 Aytoun came to London, and spent several months in the chambers, in Parliament Street, of Mr M'Dougall, a solicitor and Parliamentary agent in large practice. Here he became familiar with the procedure in Scotch appeals, and with Parliamentary business. He was also a good deal employed in regard to various public measures relating to Scotland, where his local knowledge and business tact were found to be of considerable service. He visited the gallery of the House of Commons whenever a debate of unusual interest gave him an opportunity of hearing the leading speakers of the day. The idea of entering the diplomatic service seems to have been entertained for a time, but abandoned, because he could not see his way to any tolerable position without more influence at his back than he could hope to command. For the same reason he gave up the thought of going to the English bar. In June 1833 he writes from London to his father: "One thing I am resolved on—viz. that I shall not go to the English bar. I have heard a great deal about it lately, and find that, unless I could live for ten years like a chameleon, I have no chance of business.

Even then, supposing my resolution were to last till then, success is almost worse than a lottery, without English connections, which I have not."

The experience of one session in London obviously satisfied Aytoun that it was not there he was to look for a career. He was still only nineteen, but being without fortune, the subject of a profession pressed itself anxiously upon him. His father had given him the best education his means could afford, and had every wish to enable him to continue to prosecute his studies for some time longer. With this view he assented to his son's proposal to spend the following winter in Germany, for the purpose of studying the German language and literature, the value of which was then beginning to be understood and appreciated in this country. But while doing so he continued to urge his son to make up his mind whether or not he would devote himself to the profession which he had chosen for him, that of a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh. Between desire to comply with the wishes of his father, whom he loved deeply, and his own aversion to this profession, Aytoun underwent a severe struggle, as his letters of the period show. He had by this time formed a marvellously just estimate, as after events proved, of his own powers. Mere disinclination to the legal profession he could overcome from a sense of duty, and overcome it he did in the end; but he felt that he had not the special qualities of mind which are required to insure success or distinction in that profession. He was therefore unwilling to pledge

himself hastily to comply with his father's wish; and in November 1833 wrote to him thus from Aschaffenburg, to which he had gone in the previous September to pursue his German studies:—

The thought of my future profession is to me a subject of considerable anxiety. The more I think upon the profession of the law, the more I am disinclined to it; nor do I believe that I shall ever bring myself to regard it with even tolerable complacency. I trust you will not blame me for speaking, as indeed I have ever done, without disguise; and I can only repeat what I have formerly said, that it should be my choice only in the case of unavoidable necessity, to which everything must bend. It is not only the unconquerable dislike I bear it which causes me to speak thus, but a consciousness of my own inability ever actively to pursue it with success. It requires not only the greatest attention and incessant diligence, which I acknowledge are certainly in the power of every one to bestow, but also a peculiar sharpness, and, above all, accuracy, which I do not possess.

These views appear not to have been agreed in by his father; and in a future letter (28th December 1833) Aytoun recurs to the subject in the following terms:—

You must be yourself aware what a very indifferent lawyer I will make, if I were to commence W.S. with the reluctance I have to the profession, and a head by no means fitted for it. Perhaps you think differently of my capabilities, but such is my own grave measure of myself. You have often told me that it only needs industry for a man to accomplish anything. This I conceive to be false reasoning. For instance, a man may sit down even with heart and soul to mathematics, and after the labour of years may scarcely comprehend the principles. Out of all the officers in our army, how many could ever become great generals? Perhaps not five. It is the same with architecture, with painting—in short, with everything. I will venture to say there is some one science which no man can achieve, being totally unfitted for it by nature; and my stumbling-block is most un-

fortunately the profession which lies just at my feet. I may say with the Earl of Warwick—

> "But in these nice sharp quillets of the law,
> Good faith! I am no wiser than a daw."

You will keep in view, however, that I speak principally of the business in the Court and of conveyancing. In the first I should be no match for the sharper brothers of the trade; and for the second I am not sufficiently exact and particular. But for general agency or other business I have no such objection; and if it could in any way be managed that my attention should be turned towards these branches, I am ready to give way to your wishes. I know that a good man of business should be master of all the branches of his profession, but for me that will be impossible. I have written thus fully to explain my own views and sentiments; and having done so, I leave the matter in your own hands, being fully sensible that you will weigh it well, and determine for the best.

While distracted by these thoughts as to his future career, Aytoun was reading hard at Aschaffenburg. He had selected for his tutor there Professor Joseph E. Merkel, a distinguished scholar, and a man of very great and various attainments. Under his guidance he acquired in a very few months a mastery of the language, which set open to him the treasure-house of German poetry and general and critical literature, from which he gathered materials which were of infinite advantage to him in his future career.

Soon after he established himself at Aschaffenburg he commenced a translation into verse of the first part of Goethe's 'Faust,' then only known in English through the version of Lord Leveson Gower. On 15th December 1833 he writes to his mother:—

I lead a lonely and philosophic life, doing little else than reading German. I have been chiefly occupied with translating Goethe's 'Faust' into English verse, which is a difficult task; but Merkel vows the translation is excellent. If I can finish it soon—that is to say, in time to see it printed before I leave Germany—I may publish it on the Continent, a much better place for such a work than England. Indeed, the bookseller here has made me an offer for it, but I should prefer having it brought out in Leipzig, if possible.

It was completed by March, by which time Aytoun appears to have changed his mind as to publishing it in Germany. In a letter to his father on the 4th of that month he says:—

I wish to publish it, even though I should rather lose than gain by it, for the following reasons: In the first place, I am not afraid of any great superiority in Blackie's translation, or at least that his can be so good as to throw mine altogether into the background. In the second—although it is now, I suppose, settled that I am to betake myself for a time to the law—I am very anxious to increase, if I can, any little literary reputation I may have acquired, which you are sensible is not to be done by keeping my hands in my pockets. You, perhaps unwillingly, touched in your last letter upon a subject which I have for some time contemplated—viz., a Chair in the University. The Chair of Belles Lettres, which, in the time of Blair, was the best attended in the College, must, in the common course of events, be vacant in the course of a few years. In its present state, it is not likely that any very distinguished name will be found among the candidates, and if such should be the case I will make a push for it. I mention this chiefly to show you that I have some ultimate objects in view in pursuing my literary studies, and as a reason why I wish this translation published.

This wish was never carried out. When Aytoun returned to Edinburgh in April 1834, not only had his friend Professor Blackie published his translation, but

no less than three others were either published or announced as in the press. Finding the market forestalled, Aytoun gave up his intention, and his translation never saw the light. Had it appeared, it would have taken high rank among its competitors at the time. It is remarkable for accuracy, a quality wanting in nearly all English translations previous to Mr Hayward's admirable one in prose; but it could not have satisfied Aytoun's maturer judgment as an adequate exponent of its great original. The poem is one which no man so young as he was at the time can even fully appreciate, much less translate. Moreover, with all his mastery of language and rhythm, which was by no means small, it was not possible that Aytoun should have fulfilled the indispensable condition of reproducing the form as well as the matter of the poem. This he did not even attempt, for the translation is in blank verse throughout, with the exception only of the songs and a few of the lyrical passages. Under this mode of treatment the peculiar charm of the original is necessarily lost. Aytoun no doubt felt this strongly as years went on, and so he never either revised his work, or thought of giving it to the press. Indeed, the fever of enthusiasm which originally prompted the translation passed into the chill stage, and in after years he was rather disposed to underrate the merits of a large portion of one of the few works of its time for which immortality may with some certainty be predicted.

Much has been written about the Faustus of the

old legend, who, it is now well understood, was a real person, one Johann Faust of Wittenberg, whom Melanchthon knew, and whose practices of "the arts inhibited" brought him to a miserable end. But I have nowhere seen any mention made of his conjuring-book as being actually in existence at Aschaffenburg, where Aytoun saw it in 1834. Of this circumstance he speaks in one of his lectures in the following terms:—

Shortly after quitting this university I went to study in Germany, and resided for some time at the town of Aschaffenburg on the Maine. It was formerly the capital of the Elector of Mayence, and is still the head court for what are called the Rhenish Provinces of Bavaria. Whilst there I took a fancy to attempt a translation of Goethe's 'Faust,' and did so under the superintendence of Dr Merkel, a very learned and ingenious German professor. One day, when we were discussing the subject together, I ventured to start the heterodox opinion that, after all, the printer and the conjuror might be one and the same person. The professor assured me that such was not the case; that Faustus of Wittenberg had been tried for sorcery in the criminal court of that very province; and that not only the record of his trial, but his very conjuring-book, were still in existence. You may believe that I was very desirous of seeing a curiosity which I presume to be unique in the world; and accordingly, after a good deal of trouble, for the archives there are very closely kept, I obtained a view of Faust's particular volume. It was in an oaken case, secured by a chain and padlock, and contained within a good many boards, covered on each side apparently with parchment. On one side of each board there was painted with great skill and delicacy the full-length portrait of a spirit or demon, with his name inscribed below; and I assure you, gentlemen, that some of them were individuals whom I would by no means willingly have invoked. Beneath each picture was drawn the pentagram or cabalistic sign of the spirit, and the extent and

limit of his powers. Some could raise tempests—some cause delusions—some discover hidden treasures; and on the reverse of each board were written the spells for summoning them, and the precautions necessary to be taken. The book was most extraordinary, even as a work of art; and I can truly say that, in turning it over, I felt almost as much astonished as William of Deloraine might have been when he took the volume from the hand of the Scottish Wizard. But what struck me more forcibly than anything else was an inscription at the end of the volume to this effect: "I, Johann Faust, have made this book, which contains the semblances of the spirits which may be evoked, with their signs, and the spells which can compel them. But thou, whosoever thou art, who shalt open it, beware; for by doing those things I have lost myself, soul and body.—Jo. FAUSTUS." I cannot vouch for the exact accuracy of these words, for I was not allowed to copy anything, but I wrote them down from memory shortly afterwards. The book is most undoubtedly genuine, and I think you will agree with me that very few manuscripts are to be found of so extraordinary a nature.

Unquestionably this is so, and it is only surprising that so remarkable a volume should have escaped the researches of the numerous contributors to Faustian literature, or the reproductive skill of literary antiquarians. Access to the volume may now, perhaps, be less difficult, and we may expect to hear fuller particulars of its singular contents. Aytoun always mentioned the volume with a kind of solemn awe. It spoke to him of the perdition of a human soul, and gave for him all the force of reality to the closing scene of Marlowe's 'Faustus,' which he held to be supreme in tragic power among the great dramas of the Elizabethan age. I can even now recall the trembling earnestness of tone with which he used to quote the lines,—

"Oh Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!"*

Among Aytoun's letters home at this period, preserved by the loving care of his mother, are to be found some notices, not without interest, of how he lived at the quiet and picturesque little town of Aschaffenburg. Here, for example, is a statement of his expenses for a month. It is very doubtful whether, under the equalising influence of railways, a young man could live there on the same easy terms at the present day:—

7th November 1833.

Expenses for a Month.

Lodgings, fire, coffee, &c., . .	£1	4	6
Dinner, ...	1	0	0
Supper, wine, &c., . . .	1	10	6
Servant, ...	0	3	6
Tobacco, ...	0	2	6
	£4	1	0
24 tickets for the theatre, . .	0	14	0
	£4	15	0

* In Scotland, Aytoun's reading of poetry was much admired. However it might fail in the subtle balancing of tones, the skilful pauses, the seeming artlessness of emphasis which distinguish first-rate reading, I have no doubt it made up for any defects in these particulars by earnestness and imaginative fervour. When he read such a ballad as "The Battle of Otterbourne," his own emotion was

Exclusive of books and sundries, the latter of which may be about £1, 10s.; so that mere living here may be computed at £60 or £70 per annum. £20 would keep me well in clothes and boots for a year, so that for £100 one might live excellently. In London, according to my computation, taking clothes into account, one could not spend less than £200, living very narrowly indeed, and drinking even swipes gingerly.

In another letter he says—

I pay for the best lodgings I can get here, consisting of two rooms, only ten shillings a-month, and the interior department is at the same ratio.

Further on he says—

The only recreations which the good people of Aschaffenburg seem to court are Rhine wine and ninepins, a game which the whole city are engaged in from four to eight every evening.

Its ladies, as indeed throughout Germany, are chiefly distinguished for their enormous mouths and feet.

Despite the unattractiveness of the women of the place, Aytoun seems to have found a hearty enjoyment in its simple ways and homely pleasures.

We had a great ball here [he writes to his father, on 9th September 1833] in the Casino, about a fortnight ago, in honour of the king's birthday, where I counted four gentlemen who wore gloves. The dress is just the same as ours, only that the tailors are a century behind; and as for the ladies, the less that is said about their faces or their feet the better. You have no conception of the decorum practised here. If a man is seen walking in

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so thoroughly communicated to the hearer that the minor niceties of delivery became of no importance. It was the same with Professor Wilson's reading, which at times reached the very height of tragic power. The murder-scene in 'Macbeth,' as I have heard him read it in the course of his lectures, stands alone in my memory for its vivid impressiveness.

the streets with a woman, their marriage is considered as inevitable; and if a German lady were to present you with a bunch of flowers, the town would be in a ferment for a week. However, the people are very kind after their own fashion. There are a great number of military in the town, as indeed throughout all the Continental states, but very orderly and well-behaved, and the officers among the most polished men here. There is also a university, but heaven defend me from the students! who are a very greasy set of knaves indeed. You will get a tolerably good notion of them from Russell's 'Tour in Germany.' As far as I can see, the people here are very happy, and the differences of rank are not nearly so tightly drawn as with us.

Aytoun's letters home during his stay at Aschaffenburg speak eloquently both of his own affectionate heart and the admirable training he had received. "Honour thy father and thy mother" was then as ever a living law of his life, and it showed itself in the affectionate deference which he paid to all their wishes, to the sacrifice at times of his own very strong inclinations. Mingled with this reverential regard, a vein of playfulness runs through his letters, which shows on how happy a footing of confidence and familiarity he stood towards them. His letters to his mother in particular are full of tenderness. She seems to have had her own misgivings as to the kind of company her boy was likely to fall into. Duels and beer were inseparably connected in those days—not in her mind alone—with the idea of German student-life. Some misgivings on this head to which she had given expression drew from Aytoun the following assurance—that he was in no danger of coming home minus an eye, or, like Baron Munchausen, gashed horribly across nose and cheek:—

——— writes that your great horror is, that I may be spitted by some irascible student, with his bloody cut-and-thrust pistols and double-barrelled swords. Don't be afraid on that account. In the first place, there is no fighting allowed here; in the second, though I must confess the rogues to be sinewy swordsmen, they stand in great awe of powder and ball; and, third and lastly, I never come into contact with them, as they seem to stand in equal awe of soap and water.

Aytoun's mother, one might have thought, would have known her son too well to have construed his little bits of humour literally. But her maternal anxiety had obviously blinded her perception of the boundaries between jest and earnest, when she allowed herself to be thrown into a state of alarm by the following expressions in a letter written a fortnight after that last quoted:—

I hear of nothing but wars and rumours of wars—Russia and Britain—the Bear, the Lion, and the Eagle. Pray, are we really going to have a stramash? In that case I have half a mind to take a campaign in the French service.

These words were taken by Mrs Aytoun as the probable prelude to a career of "ambuscadoes, foreign blades;" and a few weeks afterwards Aytoun had to write to his sister to quiet her apprehensions of so untoward a wind-up to his German studies:—

I was tickled into considerable convulsions by my mother's timorous remarks about a certain French campaign, mustachio'd cavaliers, &c., for which I was at first at some loss to account, till I called to mind an innuendo in my last, which was merely intended as a jocose quip to fill up the letter. I thought you were all aware already how little of the pugnacious and bloodthirsty was in my mild, soft, and philosophic character; and as for the said "cavaliers who have been putting foolish notions into my poor

dear head," I can assure you that they are as tame a set of unwarlike beings as ever swigged beer or blew a cloud.

From the same letter we extract another characteristic passage:—

No event has happened here lately except one or two masked balls, where I had a great deal of amusement, as I was not masked myself, and well known *par excellence* as "Der Engländer." I was attacked by the women on all sides; most extraordinary anecdotes of my life were related, several of which, being true, puzzled me not a little; but in so small a town as this, and sometimes even in so large a one as Edinburgh, people pay considerable attention to the affairs of others, especially when a city contains a few dowagers, from forty, fifty, and sixty years of age upwards, who *immediately* retail everything they hear, adding cent per cent for their trouble. Of course, I allude to nobody in particular. Both these balls, by the way, took place upon Sundays. Now, how do you think I saved my conscience? By not consulting it at all? No such thing. Guess again. Why, by staying at home till twelve chappit! There's both piety and ingenuity for you.

Writing to his mother shortly before he left Aschaffenburg to return home, he draws a contrast between Sunday as he saw it observed there, and Sunday as he had known it in England, which is unhappily still true in all its main features. Aytoun had frequent occasion afterwards, by what he saw in the two great cities of Scotland, to prove the truth of the views thus early formed by him on a subject of vast importance, but which will never be dealt with satisfactorily till men have the courage to shake off the hypocritical cowardice which shrinks from open protest against the tyranny of customs in the wisdom of which they have long ceased to believe.

ASCHAFFENBURG, 1*st April* 1834.

The people here are certainly more religious, and attend far better to public worship, than the generality in Britain, a circumstance which I must attribute to their very different way of passing the Sunday. With us, it is in vain to deny that it is little better than a day of penance, and, to say the truth, I have generally found it tolerably wearisome in Edinburgh. Here it is a day both of religion and relaxation. Every one goes twice to church; but mark! the service only lasts *one* hour; and in the afternoon you shall see the honest burghers going out with their wives and children to the gardens and public walks round the town, not swigging brandy or porter in an alehouse, but amusing themselves with coffee or cider. If you wish to know why the Sabbath-day is broken in England, I will answer you in one word. All innocent amusement is denied to the people; and if my theory be right, and if Sir Andrew Agnew's new bill be carried, you will see what a pretty business they will make of it. I remember, one Sunday, passing the gin-shops in Tottenham Court Road late in the evening. Good God! what a spectacle was there! It was enough to make one's heart bleed to see the women, more than half intoxicated already, carrying their infants into the shops. And why is this? Because all innocent amusement on Sunday is denied to the people. Open tea-gardens, open coffee-houses, open even the theatres on Sundays, do what you will—only shut the gin-shops, and beware of tempting people to break the law by forcing them to observe it. I hope you will not think these unorthodox opinions. I utter them by the best proof of all, for I utter them by comparison.

Professor Merkel formed a very high opinion of Aytoun's abilities, and expressed it in a letter to his father, 24th February 1834:—

As for your son William [he writes], if I did not fear the reproach of being a flatterer, I would declare him to be a very clever young man; but because this seems itself only to be a kind of disguised flattery, I am indeed at a loss how to speak about him. He shows many good qualities, and if he has some

bad ones, they are too deeply hidden to be discovered; and as to his imperfections, I am too shortsighted to perceive them, if there are any. He is always in good health, and takes care of it. As far as I know, and his appearance may be trusted to, he lives in a sober and regular way. Our climate agrees with him exceedingly well, and his progress in study keeps equal pace with the bodily state. The only thing I fear is, that he will hurt his eyes by too much reading and writing. As to the German, he already understands almost everything he reads, and will be soon as perfect a scholar in German literature as one can prove after the well-received instruction of four or five months; and this I suppose to be much more the result of his docility than of my aptness to teach.

Before he left Aschaffenburg, Aytoun had acquired a thorough command of German; but his general powers had also greatly expanded under Merkel's excellent guidance, and he had thought as well as read much. It was apparently the turning-point of his life. He had begun to feel wherein his strength lay, and to shape his studies towards a definite end. The change wrought upon him by his stay at Aschaffenburg was sufficiently marked to attract the notice of an intimate friend of his school and college days, Mr George Makgill, who was then residing at Frankfurt. "After being with Merkel some time," this gentleman informs me, "Aytoun came to visit me at Frankfurt, and I remember being much struck with the change a few months had produced in the vigour and development of a tone of thought which then plainly showed itself as genius. I remember, too, his enthusiasm about Tieck, whose works he had just read, and which seem to have opened to him, as I suppose they do to every one, a new state of existence. He brought with him and

showed me fragments of several works he had begun, none of which I now recollect, except one, which was a sketch of Bothwell."

This was, in truth, a period of great literary activity with Aytoun. But although he wrote much, his ripening judgment made him severe upon his own work, and less inclined to rush into print than he had been before. I know that at this period, besides his version of the 'Faust,' he had attempted translations of several of Goethe's minor poems; but they remained in his memorandum-books until some years afterwards, when, along with myself, he published in 'Blackwood' a series of papers on the minor poems and ballads of Goethe. As an instance of the infinite labour of which he thought those masterpieces worthy, he had, as he then told me, been trying for nine years to translate "The Bride of Corinth" in the original metre, but had not been able to produce so much as one stanza to his own satisfaction. When, some days afterwards, I took him a version by myself of some eight or ten stanzas, which, in his judgment, satisfied in some degree the conditions of a translation of a poem so exquisite in all its details, I was struck by the fervour with which he resumed the task, and the admirable skill with which he very soon completed a version of the stanzas which it had been settled between us were to be dealt with by him. The brooding and the failures of past years had not been without their effect. The subtle charm of the poem had penetrated his whole being; and when the mood of inspiration came upon

him, it reproduced itself in apt words and a rhythmic music not wholly unworthy of the great original.

To this period I should be disposed to assign the following poem—so far as I know, unpublished—in which the character and tone of his future style begin to show themselves, coloured in some degree by the influence of the German romantic school:—

THE WANDERING JEW.

The wizard sat within his hall—
A dark and tapestried room—
Where but one taper's flaring light
Strove feebly with the gloom;
While drearily, without, the wind
Sang as around a tomb.

He read some old and mystic book
Within that lonely hall;
And as the figured arras waved
With noiseless swell and fall,
You might have thought the spirits came
Unto their master's call.

No sound there was (save the drear blast
That swooned with dismal moan)
To break the ringing silence made
So solemn and so lone;
There is not of all earthly sounds
One with so deep a tone.

It was a chamber vast and bare,
For awe and terror meet;
For nothing broke its emptiness
Save that one stony seat,
And where a mighty mirror hung
Its black and velvet sheet.

The wizard read, and still the light
Shone with a sickly glare;
That——hark! a slow and solemn step
Is creaking on the stair.
He turns him to the door, and, lo!
A stranger standeth there.

High was his mien—he stood, and gave
Nor sign, nor word, nor bow;
A palmer's mantle wrapped him round,
Like knight on saintly vow;
And 'neath his raven locks he wore
A bandage o'er his brow.

The wizard first the silence broke:
"What wouldst thou have with me?
Art thou a knight of good St John
From isles across the sea?
Or com'st thou from the Holy Land,
Or distant Galilee?"

"Oh! I have wandered far and wide,
By forest, stream, and glade;
O'er trackless seas, o'er icy zones,
O'er sands without a shade;
O'er worlds where never foot of man
Hath one dark impress made.

"The earth is all the home I have,
The heavens my wide roof-tree;
And I have roamed through many a land,
And crossed full many a sea:
And, wizard, I have crossed them all
To speak one word with thee."

"Speak out thy wish, and if my art
Can work that will of thine,
The masters of the elements

Shall bow before my sign."
"Nay, wizard—nay; nor earth nor sea
May aid that wish of mine.

"Is't not within thy magic power
The mouldering dead to raise,
And bid a shape that's long since fled
Appear before my gaze?—
Then summon from the sepulchre
A form of bygone days."

The wizard turned him hastily:
"By heaven! before that rite
The spirit of the north might quail,
And close his shuddering sight;
And couldst *thou* see nor feel thy heart
Throb, and thy cheek grow white?

"Behold! within this magic glass
A shadow shall be cast;
At every wave my wand shall call
Ten seasons from the past,
Until the phantom form appear
As thou didst see it last."

The lamp went out, but from the glass
A phosphic gleam arose,
And flickered, with a death-like haze,
As life and warmth were froze—
Faint, dim, as looks a cottage light
Afar through drifting snows.

It threw a wan and pallid light
On face and arm and hand:
On floor and wall, in long relief,
It made the shadows stand—
The stranger in his palmer's garb,
The wizard with his wand.

He waved it once, and o'er the glass
Dark masses 'gan to fly;
He waved it twice, and scudding clouds
Went swiftly hurrying by;
He waved it thrice, and then closed in
The ocean of the sky.

And at each wave dark clouds rushed up
As from a fount below,:
And joined the dense and deepening mass
That wavered to and fro,
As sways the ripe and yellow corn
When autumn breezes blow.

And still he waved, and still the mists
Rolled round the magic space;
Hath his wand lost its power, that still
The cloud is in its place?
The wizard started, and the blood
Shot o'er his time-worn face.

"Stranger, since first I waved my wand
Two hundred years have flown,
And yet from off the mirror's face
That shadow hath not gone.
Thou hast not trifled with mine art,
Or made——" "Wave on! wave on!"

Oh! startling was that stifled voice,
So pent beyond a sigh—
It was the language of a soul
Parched up with agony!
The wizard dared not question him,
And yet he knew not why.

And still he waved, until his arm
Grew weary, faint, and slack.
Ages returned from out their graves,

As on a beaten track,
Till twice six hundred years had come
From dark oblivion back.

Then on that magic mirror's face
The masses lighter grew,
And faded dimly one by one,
As flies the morning dew,
Until the glorious sun shone out
Within a heaven of blue.

It shone upon a gorgeous scene
In fairy Eastern land:
To the horizon's utmost line
There stretched a sea of sand ;
No spot of green save one was there,
But waste on every hand.

But in the foreground was a spot—
The desert's emerald gem—
Where green grass sprung and flower-shrubs laced
The fresh acacia's stem ;
And o'er the whole the palm-tree threw
Its feathery diadem.

Beneath its roots a little brook
Gushed from its parent well,
To which a loaded camel stooped,
And rung its silver bell—
Throughout the still and air-worn room
That sound was audible.

And 'neath the shade a damsel sat,
In alien garb and vest ;
And though they might not see the face
That leant upon her breast,
Yet, by her dark and glossy hair,
They well might guess the rest.

The strange man gazed upon her form
Like one who drinks his fill
Of love and freedom, which have been
A long-forgotten rill,
When their whole draughts of ecstasy
Are opened to his will.

Then died his thousand woes and pains,
His thousand cares and fears,
And forth from out their fountains gushed
A flow of blessed tears,
That with their holy influence cleansed
The misery of years.

And every prayer and every hope
That buried long had lain,
Came thirstily from out their springs
To bless his heart again,
That paid them back with bud and bloom,
As sands thank summer rain.

He gazed until that female form
Raised up her head and smiled;
Then shook his spirit as a reed,
As, with an accent wild,
He staggered on, stretched out his arms,
And shrieked, "My child! my child!"

These words dissolved the spell; the scene
Died like a taper's light;
For o'er it shot the clouds again
In curtains broad and white,
Then disappeared, and left the glass
All natural and bright.

Moveless and fixed the stranger stood,
Still as a marble stone;
His eye had fallen into a trance,

As if his heart had gone.
He turned him, as to pass away,
But word he uttered none.

The wizard stopped him with his hand,
"Man of the darksome brow,
Thy hair is like the raven's wing
That playeth with the snow—
How could she be thy child who died
A thousand years ago?

"There is, as holy legends tell,
But one who knows not death;
He who reviled the Crucified
With most accursèd breath,
And wounded with his soldier's spear
The Man of Nazareth.

"Oh, fearful thought! the very grave
Is closed 'gainst his endeavour,
And tempered is his chain of life
Too hard for aught to sever.
He hath no hope, no happiness,
For ever and for ever.

"A second Cain! he hath a mark,
That every one may know;
There is a cross of livid fire
Imprinted on his brow.
But *thou* hast no such seal as that—
Dark stranger, who art thou?"

The stranger turned, he raised his hand,
And back the bandage drew
From off his brow: one glance, *but* one,
The startled wizard threw,
And the blood fell back upon his heart—
It was the *Wandering Jew.*

CHAPTER III.

CHOOSES THE PROFESSION OF THE LAW—CALLED TO THE BAR, AND HIS PROGRESS THERE—FIRST CONTRIBUTIONS TO 'BLACKWOOD'—THE BON GAULTIER PAPERS AND BALLADS—"THE FLYING DUTCHMAN," A PROSE BURLESQUE—"THE ELDER'S WARNING," A LAY OF THE CONVOCATION—NATIONAL AND JACOBITE SYMPATHIES—THE LAYS OF THE CAVALIERS—VIEWS ON BALLAD POETRY—DEATH OF HIS FATHER—HIS POLITICAL VIEWS—AS A HUMORIST—NEW THEORY OF RIZZIO'S MURDER—ART-CRITICISM—"THE SPANISH LEGION," A SKETCH—"THE LAY OF THE LEGION"—THE "CANNIBAL KILWINNING"—JOINT-STOCK CEMETERIES—"ST MARY'S CHURCHYARD," A SKETCH—"THE SCOTTISH CHRISTMAS"—"THE JULIET"—"LYCAON," A BALLAD.

WHEN Aytoun returned home from Germany, he found that he must bend to circumstances and make the best of the profession of the Law, which alone was open to him. He therefore resumed his place in the chambers of his father's firm; and having in due time passed the necessary examinations, was admitted as a Writer to the Signet in 1835. He continued until 1840 in the same chambers, where he acquired a fair knowledge of the principles and practice of Scotch law, and an experience of general business, which were afterwards of great value to him. To this training, indeed, was unquestionably due the very considerable

power he possessed of mastering the details of any intricate question, and of bringing a practical judgment to bear upon them. But his father's business had declined, and not seeing any prospect of improvement, Aytoun resolved to try his fortune at the Bar, to which he was called in 1840:—

I was called to the bar [says Norman Sinclair—and here Aytoun is again describing himself—] and entered upon my profession with the same zeal, promptitude, and success as are exhibited by, and attend three-fourths of, the unhappy young gentlemen who select that school of jurisprudence. I appeared punctually in the Parliament House at nine, cravated, wigged, and gowned to a nicety; took my prescribed exercise of at least ten miles *per diem* on the boards; talked scandal with my brethren (when we could get it), and invented execrable jokes; lounged at stove and library; wrote lampoons against the seniors; and, in short, went through the whole curriculum expected from a rising votary of Themis. I followed the law diligently; but, somehow or other, I never could overtake it.

The truth is, he never conquered his dislike to the profession; nor do I think he ever applied himself in earnest to rise to distinction in it. Had he done so, so great were his powers of application where he felt an interest, that he must have succeeded. But the feeling of distrust in his own fitness for the exact and painful labours of the lawyer, which he had expressed when writing to his father from Aschaffenburg in 1834—perhaps, too, a consciousness of want of nerve for the coarser warfare of the bar *—weighed year by year more

* "I had not in me enough of the bully to bluster my way at the bar, which is the secret of early, if not of enduring, success."—NORMAN SINCLAIR.

heavily upon him. He did not resolutely strive to make head against these, and therefore he was doomed to see himself outstripped in the struggle for business and professional honours by men greatly inferior to himself in natural gifts.

His well-known love of literary pursuits—a dangerous reputation for a young barrister, and more dangerous then even than now—did him no good with the solicitors. He was a favourite upon the Western Circuit, where he took a good deal of the criminal business. His skill in picking flaws in an indictment, in cross-examining witnesses, and conciliating juries, procured him many briefs. But whatever distinction this kind of work may have brought him in Glasgow and elsewhere, it was not followed by a rush of solicitors to his chambers with business of a more profitable kind. It was not without strong personal sympathy, therefore, that he alludes, in many of his papers, to "the briefless army of the stove," that brigade of stout-hearted clever fellows who, year after year, have to hope on against hope for the day which comes to few, when their tables will groan under a weight of briefs, and their voices be heard with respect in the chambers of the Inner House. Aytoun, however, was not strictly one of the briefless. He had a moderate share of work, and did it, as I have reason to know, carefully and well. Still he did not make that progress at the bar which was necessary to assure him of an income. He could neither afford to wait through long years of disappointment, nor was he of the disposition to do so. Literature

was dearer to him than law; and while still showing himself punctually in the Parliament House, and ready to take whatever work offered, he continued to write copiously both in prose and verse.

In March and May 1836 Aytoun published in 'Blackwood' translations of several of Uhland's finest poems, which were very generally admired. His next contribution appeared in May 1839. It was a very spirited translation of the twenty-second book of the 'Iliad,' in English trochaics—a measure of which Mr Gladstone has shown his approval by adopting it. In a letter from that gentleman to Aytoun, dated 16th January 1862, after expressing his admiration of this fragment, he writes:—

> I cannot but hope you will resume and extend your labours. It would be much too bold to say that you have projected a satisfactory measure for rendering Homer; yet it seems to me well worth consideration whether the measure which (so far as I know) you are entitled to call yours, is not more satisfactory than any other. I mentioned to you how the short specimen of it [quoted in the 'Times'] took hold of me. Indeed, it set me to work; and at odds and ends of time I have since executed some odds and ends of translation—none of them, however, in your manor, the twenty-second book, most of them in the first book—with which I have made a progress that I may call involuntary, as it runs, I find, in the head, whether one will or no.

Aytoun does not appear to have gone further with his translation; the field is therefore clear for Mr Gladstone to complete his version at those odds and ends of time which only busy men know how to turn to account.

In November 1839 Aytoun's beautiful poem "Her-

motimus" appeared in 'Blackwood.' It is written in the measure of Goethe's "Bride of Corinth"—a measure so difficult that not even its extreme beauty seems to have inspired any other writer to adopt it.

In 1840 "The Life and Times of Richard the First"—a careful and agreeably written compilation by Aytoun from the best authorities—appeared in the series of 'The Family Library.' In May of the same year he published in 'Blackwood' a few charming translations from the Romaic, of some of which he thought so well as to reprint them along with his 'Lays of the Cavaliers.' His next published poem which he thought worthy of preservation was "Blind Old Milton," which appeared in 'Blackwood' for December 1841.

It was at this time that I made Aytoun's acquaintance, through the introduction of Edward Forbes, the great naturalist, then a leading spirit among the students of the Edinburgh University, beloved and honoured by all who came within the sphere of his influence. Our acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy; an intimacy cemented by a community of tastes and pursuits, and only interrupted by my removal from Edinburgh in 1846. Some papers of a humorous kind, which I had published under the *nom de plume* of Bon Gaultier,* had hit Aytoun's fancy; and when I proposed to go on with

* The readers of Rabelais will know where the name "Bon Gaultier" comes from; but as Rabelais is less read than talked of, it may not be amiss to quote the passage: "A moy n'est que honneur et gloire d'estre dict et reputé Bon Gaultier et bon compaignon; en ce nom, suis bien venu en toutes bonnes compaignies de Pantagruelistes."—Prologue, *livre premier.*

others in a similar vein, he fell readily into the plan, and agreed to assist in it. In this way a kind of Beaumont-and-Fletcher partnership commenced in a series of humorous papers, which appeared in Tait's and Fraser's Magazines during the years 1842, 1843, and 1844. In these papers, in which we ran a-tilt, with all the recklessness of youthful spirits, against such of the tastes or follies of the day as presented an opening for ridicule or mirth, at the same time that we did not altogether lose sight of a purpose higher than mere amusement, appeared the verses, with a few exceptions, which subsequently became popular, to a degree we then little contemplated, as the 'Bon Gaultier Ballads.' Some of the best of these were exclusively Aytoun's, such as "The Massacre of The M'Pherson," "The Rhyme of Sir Lancelot Bogle," "The Broken Pitcher," "The Red Friar and Little John," "The Lay of Mr Colt," and that best of all imitations of the Scottish ballad, "The Queen in France." Some were wholly mine, and the rest were produced by us jointly. Fortunately for our purpose, there were then living not a few poets whose style and manner of thought were sufficiently marked to make imitation easy, and sufficiently popular for a parody of their characteristics to be readily recognised. Macaulay's 'Lays of Rome' and his two other fine ballads were still in the freshness of their fame. Lockhart's 'Spanish Ballads' were as familiar in the drawing-room as in the study. Tennyson and Mrs Browning were opening up new veins of poetry. These, with Wordsworth, Moore,

Uhland, and others of minor note, lay ready to our hands,—as Scott, Byron, Crabbe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey had done to James and Horace Smith in 1812, when writing the 'Rejected Addresses.' Never, probably, were verses thrown off with a keener sense of enjoyment. In writing them we had no thought of the public; and it was a pleasant surprise to us when we found how rapidly they became popular, not only in England, but also in America, which had come in for no small share of severe though well-meant ridicule. It was precisely the poets whom we most admired that we imitated the most frequently. This was not certainly from any want of reverence, but rather out of the fulness of our admiration, just as the excess of a lover's fondness often runs over into raillery of the very qualities that are dearest to his heart. "Let no one," says Heine, "ridicule mankind unless he loves them." With no less truth may it be said, Let no one parody a poet unless he loves him. He must first be penetrated by his spirit, and have steeped his ear in the music of his verse, before he can reflect these under a humorous aspect with success.

The brothers Smith, in the preface to the 1833 edition (the thirtieth) of the 'Rejected Addresses,' express surprise at the fact that none of those whom they "had parodied or burlesqued ever betrayed the least soreness on the occasion, or refused to join in the laugh that they had occasioned." Rather might they have felt surprise had it been otherwise. Such parodies as theirs are in effect a compliment. It is only a strongly

marked and original style both of sentiment and expression, and one, moreover, that has taken a thorough hold of people's minds, which can be parodied with success. When Aytoun had himself caught the ear of the public by the stirring music of his "Burial-March of Dundee," and the swinging measure of his "Charles Edward at Versailles," he thought it no unfriendly act on my part when I published some verses which now appear in the 'Book of Ballads' as "The Dirge of the Drinker," and which seem to have hit off his manner so closely that even a critic so acute as Mr Hannay professes to see that "Aytoun's hand is very visible" in them.* So much for conjecture in matters of this description.

Our co-operation was not confined to verse. We had many a pleasant day's sport over the hunting-grounds of prose as well, sending our shafts of sarcasm or jest right and left at whatever quarry came within our reach. Of our joint papers, a series of prize novelists, prior in date to those of Thackeray, acquired considerable popularity. One of these, "The Modern Endymion," by Aytoun, will be found in the appendix

* See his paper on "Recent English Humorists" in the 'North British Review' for August 1866. From a habit of working together, we naturally caught each something of the other's manner. How far this went, may be seen from the following passage in a letter of Aytoun's to myself, when revising our translations of 'The Poems and Ballads of Goethe' for the press in 1858: "On going over the poems, I was very much struck by the occasional resemblance of our styles. There is one of yours, "To My Mistress," which I could almost have sworn to as mine from the peculiarity of the cadence, if I did not know it to be yours."

to this volume. It is an imitation of Mr Disraeli's earlier manner, and is worth preserving as a specimen of broad rattling humour, full of the quaint turns of thought and expression which distinguished Aytoun's ordinary talk. The following very happy burlesque of the nautical tales which used in the days of the Annuals to be inflicted on the public by the imitators of Fenimore Cooper and Captain Marryat belongs to the same period, 1842:—

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN.

A TALE OF THE SEA.

We were in the midst of the storm-tossed Atlantic. A heavy simoom, blowing N.E. by S., brought in the huge tropical billows mast-high from the Gulf of Labrador, and awoke old ocean, roaring in its fury, from its unfathomable depths. No moon was visible among the hurricane rack of the sky—even the pole-star, sole magnet of the mariner's path, was buried in the murky obscurity of the tempest; nor was it possible to see which way the ship was steering, except by the long track of livid flames which followed in the wake of the bow, or when, at times, some huge leviathan leapt up from the water beside us, and, descending with the vehemence of a rock hurled from heaven, drove up a shower of aquatic splinters, like a burst of liquid lava from the sea. All the sails which usually decorated the majestic masts of H.M.S. Syncope (a real seventy-nine of the old Trafalgar build, teak-built and copper-fastened) were reefed tightly up, with the exception of the mainsail, the spritsail, the mizzen-boom sail, and a few others of minor consequence. Everything was cleared away—halyards, hencoop, and binnacle had been taken down below, to prevent accidents; and the whole of the crew, along with the marines and boarders, piped to their hammocks. No one remained upon deck except the steersman, as usual lashed to the helm; Josh Junk, the first bos'un; and the author of this nar-

rative, who was then a midshipman on board the vessel, commanded by his uncle, Commodore Sir Peregrine Pendant.

"Skewer my timbers!" exclaimed Mr Junk, staggering from one side of the deck to the other as an enormous wave struck us on the leeside, and very nearly unshipped the capstan—"Skewer my timbers, if this a'n't enough to put an admiral's pipe out! Why, Master Tom, d'ye see, it's growing altogether more and more darkerer; and if it a'n't clearer by twelve bells, we'll be obligated to drop anchor, which a'n't by no means so pleasant, with a heavy swell like this, running at nineteen knots an hour in the middle of the wide Atlantic. How's her head, boy?"

"North by south it is, sir," replied the steersman.

"Keep her seven points more to the west, you lubber! Always get an offing when there's a wet sheet and a flowing sea. That's right, Jem! Hold her hard abaft, and she'll go slick before the wind, like a hot knife through a pound of butter. Halloo, Master Tom, are you holding on by the seat-railings already—you a'n't sick, are you? Shall I tell the steward to fetch a basin?"

"No, no, Josh," I replied, "'tis nothing—merely a temporary qualm. But tell me—do you really apprehend any danger? If so, would it not be prudent to call up the commodore, and hang out the dead-lights?"

"Why, Master Tom," replied the bos'un, turning his quid, "them ere's kevestions as I can't answer. 'Cos, first—there's no knowing what danger is till it comes; secondly, it's as much as my place is worth to disturb old Fire-and-Faggots—axing your pardon for the liberty—afore he's finished his grog with the mates below; and, thirdly, it's no use hanging out the dead-lights, 'cos we're entirely out of oil."

"Gracious heavens!" cried I, "and suppose any other ship should be in the same latitude?"

"Then," said the bos'un, with all imaginable coolness, "I reckon it would be a case of bump. Oak varsus teak, as the law-wers say, and Davy Jones take the weakest.—But hitch my trousers! what's that?"

As the non-commissioned officer spoke, a bright flash was seen to the seaward immediately ahead of our vessel. It was too bright, too intense to proceed from any meteoric phenomena,

such as sometimes are witnessed in those tropical climates, and the sullen report which immediately followed, indicated too clearly that it proceeded from some vessel in the vicinity.

"A first-rater, by jingo!" said Mr Junk, "and in distress. Hold my telescope, Master Tom, till I go below and turn out the watch,"——but that instant his course was arrested.

Scarce a second had elapsed after the sound of the discharge reverberated through our rigging, when, only a hawser's distance from our bowsprit, a phosphoric light seemed to rise from the bosom of the shadowy deep. It hung upon the hull, the binnacle, the masts, the yards of a prodigious ship, pierced apparently for three tier of guns, which, with every sail set, bore down direct upon us. One moment more and collision was inevitable; but Junk, with prodigious presence of mind, sprang to the helm, snatched the wheel from the hands of the petrified steersman, and luffed with almost supernatural force. Like a well-trained courser who obeys the rein, our noble ship instantly yielded to the impulse, and bore up a-lee, whilst the stranger came hissing up, and shot past us so close that I could distinctly mark each lineament of the pale countenances of the crew as they stood clustered upon the rigging, and even read—so powerful was that strange, mysterious light—the words painted within her sides,—"THOSE WHO GO ABAFT THE BINNACLE PAY CABIN FARE!" On, on she drove—a lambent coruscation, cleaving the black billows of the Atlantic main, about to vanish amidst the deep darkness of the night.

"That was a near shave, anyhow," said Mr Junk, relinquishing the wheel, "but we must know something more of that saucy clipper," and catching up a speaking-trumpet, he hailed,—

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ship yourself!" was the response.

"What's your name?"

"What's yours!"

"Syncope—Britannic Majesty's seventy-nine—for Trinidad."

"Yung Fraw—merchant-ship, for Rotterdam."

"What cargo?"

"Soap!" was the reply. "How are YOU off for it? Ha! ha!"

A peal of diabolic laughter rolled across the deep, mingled

with the rushing of the waves and the whistling of the winds. Another flash—another report—and the meteor light sunk as noiselessly as it had arisen into the bosom of the watery surge. At that moment the moon burst out from behind a cloud, clear and queenlike, illuminating the ocean for miles. We rushed to the stern and looked back. In vain! no vestige of a ship was there—we were alone upon the warring waters!

"By the Lord Harry!" said the bos'un, dropping the trumpet—"as sure as my name's Josh Junk, that 'ere was the FLYING DUTCHMAN!" . . . . . .

That night we were SWAMPED AT SEA!

Among the many fugitive pieces written by Aytoun at this period is one of peculiar excellence, which sprang out of the vehement controversies that preceded the Disruption in 1843 of the Scottish National Church. Although himself a member of the Episcopal communion, this was a subject on which he felt strongly, and which had occupied much of his attention. In 1840 he had published a pamphlet upon it, under the name—'Our Zion, or Presbyterian Popery, by Ane of that Ilk,' in which he predicted, in language of deep feeling, the disastrous results which were then becoming imminent from the strife of parties in the Church. Amid the prevailing roar of controversy this pamphlet attracted but little attention. Not so the following ballad, which became at once so popular in Edinburgh, that it was extensively printed as a broadside, and "sung about the streets to filthy tunes." This was a kind of popularity to which Aytoun was no stranger. Many an election squib and ballad of his had before this found favour with "those unshaven and raucous gentlemen to whose canorous mercies," as he himself says

(article on "Ancient and Modern Ballad Poetry," 'Blackwood,' May 1847), "we are wont, in times of political excitement, to intrust our own personal and patriotic ditties." But this ballad struck a deeper note, and appealed to a wider sentiment; and I remember well Aytoun's delight when he first heard it sung to an admiring crowd upon the streets. "Seldom," he writes in the article just cited, "have we experienced a keener sense of our true greatness as a poet than when we encountered, on one occasion, a peripatetic minstrel deafening the Canongate with the notes of our particular music, and surrounded by an eager crowd demanding the halfpenny broadsheet. 'This is fame!' we exclaimed to a legal friend who was beside us; and with a glow of triumph on our countenance, we descended the North Bridge to indite another of the same."

THE ELDER'S WARNING.

A LAY OF THE CONVOCATION.

"Noo, John Makgill, my elder, come listen to my word,
It's time to leave the harrows, it's time to draw the sword;
The sheep may wander on the hill, the stots rout in the byre—
But another path is ours, John, through danger and through fire.
The cloud o' tribulation that we hae lang foreseen
Has gathered ower the land, John, like mists that rise at e'en;
The palings o' oor vineyard are gey near broken doun,
An' the bits o' vines are trampled by greedy laird and loun.
The auld Erastian lords have put their feet upon oor necks,
And oor chalders they have dwindled to little mair than pecks;
Thae weary interlocutors come pelting every day,
And the bills and the expenses are mair than we can pay.

But what is waur nor a', John, while thus distressed we stand,
Black Prelacy is crawling like pushion through the land—
The scarlet woman will be here to sit within oor ha',
For when ye see a Bishop, John, the Paip's no far awa'.
They'll soon be here to tithe ye—they'll tithe both stot and stirk;
O! waes me for the Covenant, and waes me for the Kirk!
They're ettling for the manses, John—they're ettling fast and fain;
And they'll be bringing Tam Dalyell and Claverse back again.
But we'll meet them on the ground, John, whaur we met them ance afore,
And pay thae weary Moderates a black and bitter score.
Sae lang's we're a' united, it winna do to bow
To the cankered Lords o' Session, and their wigs o' plastered tow.
We'll gather on the hills, John—we'll gather far and near—
And Candlish he will lead the van, and Cunningham the rear;
We'll think o' Bothwell Brig, John, and the Raid o' Rullion Green;
We'll show them that we lo'e the Kirk far better nor the Queen.
Our Zion is in danger, sae tak' your auld claymore;
And tak' ye down the rauchan that hangs ahint the door,
And put your braid blue bannet on, an' we'll daunder up the glen,
And meet the bauld Conventicle, as our fathers did, ye ken."
Auld John Makgill he listened, and whiles he wat his thumb,
And whiles took up the cuttie-pipe that lay beside the lum,
And whiles he keekit in the pat that held the simmering kail;
But ne'er a bit he lifted his rauchan frae the nail.

"Nae doot, nae doot! an awfu' case! the times are unco hard,
And sae your thinking, minister, to leave your ain kail-yard,
And the bonny manse and stipend, that was worth twa hundred pund—
And the Netherhaugh glebe-acres—its grand potato-grund!
An awfu' dispensation! I canna say ye're wrang,
For gin ye think ye shu'dna stop, ye're very right to gang.
And sae the Lords have beat the Kirk? that's waefu' news to tell;
Ye'se hae my blessing, minister, but I canna gae mysel'.

My auld claymore's just useless, it's rusted fu' o' holes—
Indeed, the bairns have broke it wi' hacking at the coals.
The rheumatiz is in my back—I canna tell how sair—
An' I got my death wi' driving the beasts to Hallow Fair.
I'm no the body that I was—ye ken I'm getting auld;
And as for lying out o' doors, the nights are dismal cauld!
Ye'll need a gude thick greatcoat 'gin ye're ganging up to sleep
In the bare and broken heather, 'mang the moorcocks and the sheep.
Ye'll find it's warmer lying, gif ye lie down heads and thraws,
Wi' the ither noble gentlemen that winna thole the laws.
I'm verra laith to lose ye, and so is Jenny here—
There's no a better liket man in ony parish near;
But gin the case is pressing, I wadna dare to say,
Ye'd better take a thought on't, and bide anither day.
'Twill be an unco comfort, when the nights are cauld and mirk,
To think that ye are chosen to suffer for the Kirk.
For me it's clean impossible—ye ken I'm auld and frail;
But surely, sir, afore ye gang, ye'll stop and taste our kail."

Now, glad should be our minister that he called at John Makgill's,
For cozily he kept the manse, and never took the hills.

While Aytoun's mirthful mood was disporting itself on these trifles, he was not forgetful of graver studies and higher aims. He read hard and wrote much, trying to find out in what direction his powers truly lay. Humour and poetical enthusiasm were mixed in him in nearly equal proportions. The life around him supplied abundant scope for the former; for the latter he found congenial themes in the past history of his own country. There he was hampered by no commonplace associations to chill his fervour, or to shake his

faith in his own emotions. He was not pursued by the spirit of whim into the region of

> "The old far-off unhappy times,
> And battles long ago."

In that he could give full play to the Jacobite sentiment in which he had grown up, and revel in the passionate patriotism which made Scotland more beautiful in his eyes, and more full of poetical suggestions, than the scenery or story of any other land. Aytoun was a Scot to the core, and with his love for his country was inextricably interwoven an earnest devotion to the Stuart dynasty, and admiration of the gallant men who stood by them in their troubles and fallen fortunes.

It has been said of him * that "his serious poetry was mere cleverness exercised on the traditionary material of his political school. His White Rose was not waxen—we do not say that; but we do say that it had a very faint smell; that though his Jacobite romanticism was real so far as it went, it did not go very far." No man who knew Aytoun intimately could have written this. His attachment to the Stuarts was as genuine a passion as ever stirred the heart of a Cavalier. Of course it was a thing of his imagination: all devotion is so more or less. But for him it was so real that it coloured his views of the history of that dynasty and its followers to a degree which surprised those who knew how critical was his observation

* Article on "Recent English Humorists"—'North British Review,' August 1866.

and how practical his judgment in all other matters. Touch this theme at any time, even when his flow of mirthful spirits was at its fullest, and his tremulous voice and quivering lip told how deeply seated were his feelings in all that related to it. On any other point he would bear to be rallied, but not upon this. His historical faith was to him only less sacred than his religious creed. It was a part of his very self, imbibed, doubtless, at his mother's knee, in the tales with which she charmed his childish ears, and riveted to his heart by the songs and ballads on which his youthful passion for romance and chivalry had been fed. The men and women of that race were substantial realities, around which not "merely his pastime and his happiness had grown," but to whom the worship of his imagination and the devotion of his loyalty had been given. He believed in them, lived with them, and could no more brook a slight or wrong to their names, than to the honour of a living friend. What he wrote about them was written, therefore, with the force of an almost personal devotion. His too-dominant sense of the ridiculous may have spoiled his hand, as I have sometimes thought it did, for serious verse; but it was wholly overborne by the intensity of his feeling where one of the race of Stuart, or where their great followers Montrose or Dundee, were concerned. Therefore it was that he selected the subjects of his 'Lays of the Cavaliers,' not as being "the traditionary material of his political school," to be written about with a factitious enthusiasm, but because he felt

on no other subjects so strongly, and knew that they would certainly bring out whatever of the poet was in him.

No man knew better than Aytoun that nothing deserves the name of poetry—of ballad poetry especially—except what is written, not for the sake of writing, but because some strong feeling or absorbing idea insists on finding this form of expression. Speaking of the ballad, he says:* "It is the simplest, and at the same time the sublimest, form of poetry; nor can it be written except under the influence of that strong and absorbing emotion which bears the poet away far from the present time, makes him an actor and participator in the vivid scenes which he describes, and which is, in fact, inspiration of the very loftiest kind. The few who enjoy the glorious privilege, not often felt, nor long conferred, of surrendering themselves to the magic of that spell, cease for the time to be artists; they take no thought of ornament, or of any rhetorical artifice, but throw themselves headlong into their subject, trusting to nature for that language which is at once the shortest and the most appropriate to the occasion, spurning all far-fetched metaphors, and ringing out their verse as the iron rings upon the anvil."

It may be questioned whether in his mood of inspiration the poet ceases for the time to be an artist, or whether he is not just then supremely the artist obeying his inspiration, but unconsciously interfusing in its

* Article on "Ancient and Modern Ballad Poetry"—'Blackwood's Magazine,' May 1847.

expression all the technical skill of which previous study and experience have made him master. But the general proposition here laid down by Aytoun is unquestionably true. He spoke from recent experience, for he had just before produced all his best ballads; and in the following passage from the same article, it is very clear that he is simply stating the principle on which he had himself worked:—

Unless the poet is imbued with a deep sympathy for his subject, we would not give sixpence for his chance of producing a tolerable ballad. Nay, we go further, and aver that he ought, when possible, to write in the unscrupulous character of a partisan. In historical and martial ballads there always must be two sides; and it is the business of the poet to adopt one of these with as much enthusiasm and prejudice as if his life and fortunes depended upon the issue of the cause. For the ballad is the reflex of keen and rapid sensation, and has nothing to do with judgment, or with calm deliberative justice. It should embody, from beginning to end, one fiery absorbing passion, such as men feel when their blood is up and their souls thoroughly roused within them; and we should as soon think of moralising in a ballad as in the midst of a charge of cavalry. If you are a Cavalier, write with the zeal of a Cavalier combating for his king at Naseby, and do not disgust us with melancholy whinings about the desolate hearths of the Ironsides. Forget for a time that you are a shareholder in a Life Assurance Company, and cleave to your immediate business of emptying as many saddles as possible. If you are out—as perhaps your great-grandfather was—with Prince Charles at Prestonpans, do not, we beseech you, desert the charging column of the Camerons, to cry the coronach over poor old Colonel Gardiner, fetched down from his horse by the Lochaber axe of the grim Miller of Invernahyle. Let him have the honourable burial of a brave man when the battle is over; but —whilst the shouts of victory are ringing in our ears, and the tail of Cope's horse is still visible over the knowe which rises

upon the Berwick road—leave the excellent Seceder upon the sod, and toss up your bonnet decorated with the White Rose, to the glory and triumph of the clans! If you are a Covenanter and a Whig, we need not entreat you to pepper Claverhouse and his guardsmen to the best of your ability at Drumclog. You are not likely to waste much of your time in lamentations over the slaughtered Archbishop: and if you must needs try your hand at the execution of Argyle, do not mince the matter, but make a regular martyr of him at once. In this way should all ballads be written; and such, indeed, is the true secret of the craft as transmitted to us by the masters of old.

"The Burial-March of Dundee," the first of Aytoun's ballads, appeared in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for April 1843. It is generally thought that in this and other poems of the same series his prototype was Macaulay. This, however, was not the case. If Aytoun was influenced at all by any other writer at the outset of his labours in this direction, it was by Wilhelm Müller, a German poet, who is too little known. His "Neu-Griechische Lieder" produced, I remember, a deep impression upon Aytoun; and the finest, perhaps, of them all, the "Marco Bozzaris," which had long haunted his imagination, determined the measure in which the dirge of his own favourite hero was to be sung. But while the music of Aytoun's poem was in the same rhythm as Müller's, there the resemblance ceased. It had a wild and wailing character distinctively its own, and in all its details was as thoroughly original. In this noble requiem Aytoun's genius had at last found its true expression. If he had any doubt of this, it was removed by the great and immediate popularity of the

poem, which gave him confidence to follow up the vein of wealth into which he had so happily struck.

It was about this time that Aytoun sustained his first great loss in the death of his father, who died in March 1843; and this poem and his "Charles Edward at Versailles" were written under deep personal emotion. He was now thrown entirely upon his own resources, and with a view to his future professional career it became necessary to take up a decided line in politics. For many years his opinions had been strongly Conservative; indeed they had all along been so, except during that short fever-fit of Radicalism which, it would almost seem, all young men of any force of character must at some time pass through. Aytoun recovered early; but from regard to his father's feelings, he had hitherto abstained from any public declaration of his opinions. In former years he had, owing to special circumstances, become familiar with the tactics of the Whig party, and he knew well that he must be prepared to encounter much obloquy from them when he should openly avow his allegiance to their opponents. That party was then in the ascendant, and to declare for the other side was virtually to forego for many a day all prospect of any of those professional appointments by which the zeal of legal partisans is rewarded, and which, in the then state of Aytoun's means, would have been far from unwelcome. But he had given much thought to politics. His convictions on the Conservative side had been deliberately formed, and he meant to enter the lists as a political writer. Painful,

therefore, as it was to him to encounter imputations, however unjust, of deserting his father's party, which was assumed to have been his own, he at once took care to make it clear on which side he should for the future be found. Of course he was sneered at and denounced, down to and even after his death, by those local patriots who would have rejoiced to have had him on their side. But such railings gave him but little concern; and from this time to his death, his voice and pen were vigorously employed on the side of the Conservatives.

A more delightful companion than Aytoun was at this period, it would be difficult to imagine. Full of health and vigour, and with a flow of spirits which seemed inexhaustible, his society acted like a tonic on men of a more sensitive temperament and a constitution less robust. Whatever was the topic in hand, he was sure to look at it with peculiar freshness and originality. With a quaint phrase, an unexpected epithet, or apt illustration, he would give a novel aspect to matters the most familiar. Out of men or things the most commonplace he would extract materials for pleasantry and "heart-easing mirth;" and whether his imagination was running riot in a series of grotesque images, or his judgment insinuating its conclusions in a quiet stroke of irony, he was equally happy. His wide reading and ready memory enriched his talk with endless allusions, apt, yet unexpected, which quickened the fancy of those with whom he talked, while his own vivid imagination warmed the stream of his conversa-

tion with a kind of poetical underglow. He was not a sayer of witty things, which, like the epigrams that dropped by the dozen from the mouth of Jerrold, could be written down for future generations to enjoy. Now and then, of course, things of this kind flashed from him; but in sharpness of repartee, or pungency of wit, he was surpassed by many of his compeers. He was of too kindly and sympathetic a nature, perhaps, to shine as a wit; not only was his friend dearer to him than his jest, but he had that fine instinct of pain which suspends many a flash of humour or wit that might dazzle many but must wound one.* But there was a charm of humour about his talk which it would be hard to define. It was compounded mainly of pleasant exaggeration, playful allusion, unlooked-for turns of phrase, and strong mother-wit. It was always essentially the humour of a gentleman, without cynicism and without irreverence. Irresistible while you were under its influence, it rose so entirely out of the occasion, and was so coloured by the mood of the moment—it was so much, in short, a part of the man—that it would be as

* I know of only one instance of his saying a thing which could not fail to give, and which, I fear, did give, lasting pain. It was to Thackeray, after hearing one of his "Lectures on the Georges." "Stick to your Jeames's, Thackeray! They are more in your line than the Georges." But then Thackeray had laid an unreverential hand on one of Aytoun's idols, Mary Stuart, and questioned, in one of these very lectures, her title to the enthusiastic worship of her admirers. Aytoun must have been deeply stung before he could have given expression to what was, for him, so harsh a sarcasm. Had it not already found its way into print, I should not have referred to a saying so little in harmony with the kindly nature of the man.

impossible to fix it upon paper as to perpetuate the gradations of light and colour,

> "When, rapt through many a rosy change,
> The twilight dies into the dark."

This was Aytoun in his lighter moods; but under this bubbling joyousness of spirit was a well of gentleness and tender heart, of strong feeling and chivalrous enthusiasm, which found its way to the surface on just occasion, and on just occasion only. He had, moreover, a fine eye for nature, and a subtle sympathy with all her moods and aspects, which made his familiar talk, when face to face with her, peculiarly delightful. Then his heart would open out into a stream of eloquent fancies, and the humorist was lost for the time in the ardent enthusiasm of the poet. To women he was always tenderly courteous, and with children he was always happy, and they with him.

Unlike most men, Aytoun wrote at this time very much as he spoke—only that his talk was better for the force which was lent to it by his voice and manner. Still, a better idea of what it was like may be gathered from specimens of his writing than from any description. I find none more lifelike than passages in a series of our joint-papers, in the fashion of the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ,' called "Bon Gaultier and his Friends," in which Aytoun flourished under the name of "Young Scotland." Here, for example, we have him, under the mask of a paradox, hitting at a great social nuisance:—

O'MALLEY.

Charles, what do you consider as the most commendable deed recorded in Scottish history?

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

The murder of Rizzio.

O'MALLEY.

Your reasons?

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Why, I think that all historians,—and I crave my friend Tytler's pardon if I include him amongst the rest,—have gone widely astray in attributing that meritorious event to the jealousy of Darnley. My hypothesis is this: Queen Mary, as you know, had the misfortune of a French education, and, as a matter of course, had imbibed that taste for jingling and caterwauling which at the present moment is so fearfully prevalent in Edinburgh, and is facetiously denominated music. If her majesty had contented herself with morning concerts when Darnley was out hunting, there would have been comparatively little harm; but, unfortunately, she classed oratorios among the necessaries of life, and would as soon have gone without her supper as her symphony. Accordingly, she had brought over from the Continent a gang of foreign fiddlers,—fellows with long greasy hair, fictitious collars, and linen of a dubious complexion; and, instead of encouraging dancing, flirtation, whist, or any other such innocent amusements at her soirees in Holyrood, she ordered in Signor This with the violoncello, Herr That with the cornet-a-piston, and Monsieur T'other with his guitar. Then a long, lank, melancholy-visaged Musico would sit down at the pianoforte, and continue to play for three or four hours without interruption, except, indeed, when Lord Ruthven ventured an amorous compliment in a low tone to Mary Beatoun, or Lord Lindsay of the Byres gave vent to a necessary yawn, or one of the royal servants entered the room with a tray of ices and plotty——

O'MALLEY.

Hallo, Charley! you are getting a little into anachronisms.

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Not a whit,—I see the picture as vividly as I did on Thursday last. Then Signor Rizzio would pause for a moment, and look

round him with a frown, or perhaps give vent in an undertone to some low-bred Neapolitan oath; and Queen Mary, who was all the while hanging over the back of his chair, would hold up her finger for silence, and entreat the interesting foreigner not to mind these rude interruptions. And so this sort of thing went on night after night, till flesh and blood could stand it no longer; and the young Scottish lords, who liked a waltz or a quadrille, with a snug little supper afterwards, and a few minutes' chat in the cloak-room, took heart of grace, and one fine evening conducted the Professor quietly from the piano into the antechamber, and put an end to the nuisance effectually by a stroke of the national whinyard. This is my view of the matter, and, upon my honour, I think they served the ruffian right!

Again, if the talk were of pictures, Aytoun would discourse of them in this fashion, hitting the truth not the less surely that he avoided the jargon of so-called art criticism; for besides possessing a natural talent for drawing, Aytoun had seen and studied the pictures of the best galleries north of the Alps:—

BON GAULTIER.

Landseer and Stanfield speak for themselves. The Shepherd's Chief Mourner is a painted poem which I covet. With regard to Maclise and Turner, I am inclined to be somewhat critical.

O'MALLEY.

I am glad to hear you say so. Far be it from me to decry eccentricity; but really when a gentleman has spread the scrapings of his pallet upon a milled board, and deliberately sate down upon it, it is rather a cool thing to send it, without any farther preparation, to a gallery of art, under the title of "Neapolitan Fisher Girls startled—Bathing by Moonlight!" Pink moonlight is a novelty, at least in these latitudes; and if the row of spongy figures that seem rushing through a tide of carmine are intended for Neapolitan nymphs, the species must have undergone a cross with the Centaur since I last ascended Vesuvius.

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

"Palestrina" is certainly better; but even there Turner is far too gorgeous in his colouring. The eye aches at the scorching heat of his interminable reds and yellows. Men say he paints upon a system, and I presume he composes poetry upon some similar principle. Listen to the music of the following lines:—

Or from yon mural rock,—high-crowned Præneste,
Where, misdeeming of his strength, the Carthaginian stood,
And marked, with eagle eye, Rome as his victim!!

I wish Turner would publish his literary works: they would be treasure-trove to the critics.

BON GAULTIER.

Elderly gentlemen ought never to commence a flirtation with the muse. Then as to Maclise and his picture of the Bohemian Gipsies—no one can deny his great talent for drawing; indeed I question whether any modern painter possesses a like facility. He dresses his figures well, but too theatrically: they always remind you of the Surrey side, or a field-day at Astley's amphitheatre. His grouping is open to precisely the same objection. It is a got-up spectacle, or rather a masquerade, where every one is acting for himself, without the least regard to the unity of the whole. Never was there such a group of gipsies in the habitable globe. They are the identical figures which appeared a few years ago in the train of Robin Hood, and will probably appear again at some convivial festival of the Druids. All his men exhibit their teeth, and very white they are too. Rowland should persuade him to execute a design for the wrapper of the Odonto; it would be an irresistible advertisement. His women are either sly or sensual, and not one of them has a rag of reputation left—nay, from the cradle upwards, it is plain that they were never inconveniently burdened with modesty. That jade in front, with the large eyes and voluptuous bosom, would be the ruin of a monastery, and ought not, for morality's sake, to be permitted to perambulate the country. She would pick your pocket, Charles, of every shilling you possessed; and as to O'Malley, I think I see her telling the Major's fortune!

O'MALLEY.

Faith, I should scarce object to a little palmistry from so plump a sorceress.

BON GAULTIER.

In short, although Maclise is a great painter, he would be much greater if he put clearer *purpose* into his compositions, restrained his pruriency of illustration, and worked on more dignified subjects. Both he and Etty have it in their power almost to rival Rubens; but they will never do it, so long as the one continues to paint, not after nature, but after the stage, and the other to suit the inclination rather of the voluptuary than the poet.

O'MALLEY.

Do you mean to say that Rubens was particularly refined?

BON GAULTIER.

Not always, certainly. But look at his greater works—there is no coarseness there. Rubens uninspired, and portraying earthly beauty, was a very different man from the tremendous painter of the Cross. The pictures at Antwerp and Cologne are amongst the greatest of the world. Michael Angelo alone can contest with Peter Paul for the palm of superiority in power.

Mr Hannay, in contrasting Aytoun with Peacock and Father Prout,* says of him, that he does not excel in "the drollery of *abandon*, of which downright noisy laughter is the natural result." Noisy laughter is a strong phrase, and is more likely to be produced by mere farce than by anything that deserves the name of humour. But drollery which produced hearty laughter was not only a distinguishing feature of Aytoun's social talk, but of his writings. As one of many examples which might be cited, take the following fancy sketch of De Lacy Evans's Spanish Legion—a band of

* "Recent English Humorists," 'North British Review,' Aug. 1866.

heroes who made some figure in the Carlist war, and were a fertile source of sarcasm to the wags, but are now all but forgotten:—

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Ah now, my dear fellow! do tell us something about the Legion. Confound the Old Peninsular exploits. What between Captain Hamilton and Colonel Napier and the squadron of military quill-drivers, who have spoiled more foolscap than cartridge wrappers, we know every inch of the campaigning ground from Torres Vedras to the Pyrenees. No, Captain! Give us something fresh. You were one of those who drew the sword with Evans, and gathered, if not laurels, at least a change of linen, with the Westminster heroes, from the verdant hedgerows of Spain. Surely there must be something worth remembrance in such a chivalrous crusade.

O'MALLEY.

Faith, Charley, as to linen, there was as little of that as an elderly gentleman could desire. Happy was the man amongst us who saved his own British shirts, without wasting fruitless efforts in pursuit of the Lusitanian tweel. It was a devilish bad business, I can tell you. Only conceive my disgust, when, instead of commanding a company of Herculean heroes, I found myself degraded into the leader of the most villanous pack of rogues that ever were swept from the assizes!

BON GAULTIER.

Were they really so bad?

O'MALLEY.

Barrington was a joke to my sergeant. Before he was enlisted a fortnight he had pawned the regimental colours for a quart of gin, and picked my pocket twice upon parade. It was no use tying him up to the halberts, for every one of the drummers was under sentence of transportation, and treated the back of their ancient pal as tenderly as if it had been their own. The only tune under which they would advance to action was the 'Rogue's March;' and we were obliged to remind them that they lay under the eye of the London police, before a single dummy-hunter would masticate the butt-end of a cartridge.

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

How did they behave in battle?

O'MALLEY.

Tolerably well when we got them behind the shelter of a vineyard wall. The squadron of the Seven Dials were very decent marksmen, and picked off any Carlist officer, who seemed to have a watch, with really creditable precision. I had the command for some time of the Ninth Poltroons. They were splendid foragers—first-rate fellows at the clearing of a farmhouse or the expiscation of a henroost. I have seen them, too, make very fair strippage after a skirmish, and conduct a retreat with singular intrepidity. They fought upon the system of the ancients; —the true heroic principle. Sportsmen, too, to a man! Always shot flying. Lord bless you! the British Diomede had no personal quarrel with the Peninsular Glaucus. He by no means thirsted for his blood, not he; he merely entertained a Homeric passion for his golden armour; and if that could not be compassed by stealth (fair-dealing was out of the question), he hesitated not to send a bullet through your Don, and possess himself lawfully of his spoils. What the deuce would you have more? Hector did precisely the same!

BON GAULTIER.

A very sensible reflection!

O'MALLEY.

Catch one of the Ninth exposing his carcass for nothing! I tried at first to rouse them with a few remarks about glory, freedom, and that sort of thing; but I soon perceived that although the eyes of the Whitechapel warriors were rigidly directed towards the left, every warlike tongue was knowingly insinuated into the dexter cheek. After that, I suited my language to my audience, and by persuading them that every Carlist carried a rouleau in his haversack, we managed to do tolerable execution.

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Did you remain long with this interesting corps?

O'MALLEY.

As short a time as possible. No sooner had my last pair of stockings disappeared—I own to some doubts about the probity

of the Ensign—than I exchanged into the Black Skulkers, a fine cavalry regiment, which made war principally upon its own account. We were not very particular as to the politics of the natives. A Spaniard, you know, is not to be depended upon —so we resolved ourselves into a sort of armed neutrality, and never harmed anybody unless he refused the key of the wine cellar. *That*, you know, was equivalent to an admission of treason; for where else would a man in his senses conceal a secret despatch? Many is the cask we have emptied to the bottom in order to bring those hidden secrets to light, and many a jovial night we used to have with the Padres, who in my opinion did not care a copper whether Carlist or Christino had the uppermost. Tom Burke, who was our Major, managed things admirably. He was as drunk as a fish during the whole campaign, and yet took such care of his men that not a soul of them was sacrificed in battle.

BON GAULTIER.

A judicious commander indeed!

O'MALLEY.

Was he not? We never stormed anything except a convent, and even then we behaved ourselves like gentlemen. The government were not ungrateful. Tom is a Grand Cross of the Order of *Saint Sauve-qui-peut.*

BON GAULTIER.

He bears his honours meekly.

O'MALLEY.

Very. Well, thank heaven I've done with campaigning. It's all very nice for lads like you, but an old soldier needs repose when his way of life is falling into the autumnal leaf. Charles, what's that you're after?

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Scratching down the heads of a lay "I learned e'en now of one I talked withal." Shall I sing it to you? It will do famously for a chapter in your next serial—say—"A Night with the Ninth, or Heavy Marauders," or something equally alliterative and alluring:—

THE LAY OF THE LEGION.

When I was in the Legion
  A short time ago,
We went the pace as pleasantly
  As ever you did know:
The cares of life and warlike strife
  Were all, I ween, forgot,
As we walked into the Sherry casks,
  And never paid a shot.
For we bold lads of Evans'
  Went roving with the moon—
Old Spain was made for the Newgate blade,
  And for the stout Poltroon!

We wouldn't stand no drilling,
  Oh, that was all my eye!
But did exactly as we pleased,
  And kept our powder dry.
We always fired, when 'twas required,
  Behind a vineyard fence:
But as for open cut-and-thrust,
  We'd rather too much sense.
For we bold lads of Evans'
  Marched to another tune,
And "right about!" was still the shout
  That moved the stout Poltroon!

How jolly looked the Convent!
  And, blow me! what a din
The nuns and Lady Abbess made,
  As we came thundering in!
What screams and squalls run through the walls,
  'Twas like to deafen me,
When our Captain took his helmet off,
  And begged the cellar key!

Then we bold lads of Evans'
  Got tipsy very soon,—
And if the brave will misbehave,
  Why not a stout Poltroon?

O me, that glorious Legion!
  If I were there again,
I would not leave an ounce of plate
  In any house in Spain.
I'd fake away the livelong day,
  And drink till all was blue;
For a happier life I could not lead,
  No more, my lads, could you,
Than to be a boy of Evans',
  No milk-and-water spoon,
And crack the flasks and drain the casks
  Like a regular Poltroon!

Surely this is drollery of which "downright laughter is the result," and humour, too, of a very genuine kind. And rare, indeed, was the occasion, in these early days, that Aytoun did not enliven any social gathering of his intimate friends with drollery quite as exuberant and full of sparkle as that just quoted.

One evening, while still very young, he was presiding at a meeting of the Canongate Kilwinning Lodge of Freemasons, when the treasurer of the lodge rose. He had, he said, made up his mind to emigrate; and hearing a promising account of the then new colony of New Zealand, he had resolved to cast in his lot with it. Satisfied as he was that no institution was so well fitted to civilise the savage as freemasonry, his first aim would be to found a lodge there. Fain would he identify it with the parent lodge, to which he was

so deeply attached. He should at all events wish its name to be such as to establish a connection with the distinguished body of whom he had the honour to be treasurer; and in this view he appealed to the worshipful chairman to suggest an appropriate name. Aytoun rose, and with the profoundest gravity complimented brother —— on his noble enthusiasm. It was exhilarating to find that the principles and practice of freemasonry were to be extended to the remotest regions of the earth. As he had been appealed to for a name which should recall in that distant land the glories of their beloved Canongate Kilwinning, he would take the liberty of suggesting to the worshipful the treasurer, whether the contemplated lodge in New Zealand might not with propriety be called "The Cannibal Kilwinning!" Whether the treasurer's enthusiasm survived the roars of laughter which followed, I am unable to say.

What I have written above will give some idea of what Aytoun was in his gayer and prevailing moods. But when a chord was touched that vibrated to his heart, his talk deepened into a tone of passionate earnestness, of which the following passage from the same series of papers will afford some idea. The conversation has been running on the shares of joint-stock companies, for which the mania was then (1845) at its height; and in answer to a question whether he has any cemetery shares, O'Malley replies:—

Not one. I don't think any person above the rank of an undertaker should hold stock of that description. A water company

may pass—a wine company is incomparably better—but I feel a kind of shudder at the thought of trafficking for holy ground.

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

I denounce the practice as altogether abominable. Is it not enough that men have stock-jobbed through life—sacrificed their own talents and their learning to an absorbent lust of gain—neglected all that is great and beautiful in nature—turned a deaf ear to the moaning of the factory slave, and laid themselves more prostrate than the Juggernaut heathen before the wheels of the car of Mammon?—is it not enough that they have done, and are doing this, without mixing up in their thoughts the awful secrets of the grave with the list of their weekly gains? Is it well that the sight of the hearse, with its mournfully nodding plumes, white or black, and the ghastly emblems of mortality emblazoned on its sides, should suggest the sole idea, that another poor corner of their unconsecrated area has been taken, and that DEATH itself has become the active patron of their dividends? Oh, rather than your trellised and gardened cemetery, with its tawdry urns and whited sepulchres, give me the quiet of the country churchyard—"God's field," as the Saxons call it—where the elders of the congregation sleep around the edifice where they came to adore! Or, better still—to me at least—give me the long grey aisle of the roofless abbey, though the altar be thrown down, the thick ivy clustered on the wall; and although neither song nor hosanna shall again, so long as the world remains, be heard within its sacred pale. Dunfermline, Melrose, Dryburgh!—The Bruce, the Douglas, and the Scott!—has the earth any such glorious sepultures as these? Rather would I be laid, could I hope to be worthy of that honour, in such a hallowed spot, with nothing save a cross for my headstone, than in the costliest mausoleum that ever held the crumbling bones of an emperor!

. . . . . .

I know in the south a graveyard placed upon the slope of a hill in the girdle of the ever-green mountains. It is a lonely unconspicuous spot, rarely visited, except by the passing shepherd, or, when some small train of mourners—for the people venerate it still—come up the solitary glen, to lay their dead beside its kindred dust. In spring you may see the plover resting upon

its wall, the young leverets gambolling around it, and the grouse whirring from her nest among the heather, scared away by your approach. Reach it, and you find that it is half defended by a natural trench; for a mountain stream has worn its deep black gulley in the rock, and comes brawling down, white and furious in flood, but in dry weather only strong enough to make a pleasant and continuous murmur. On the mound above there is a ruin, the faintly-defined remnant of a wall; in some places a line of crumbling stones, in others the mere elevation of a green and daisied sward. That was once the holiest fane of the south; for there stood the chapel of Saint Mary's of the Lowes, which pious men had built, and where good men came to pray. But the faith of the land was changed—it may be wisely, but surely it was rudely done—and in one night the hills of Yarrow were lighted up with more terrific flames than ever notified the approach of the English invaders; and a long pillar of red fire, wrapping in its conflagration all that for centuries had been deemed most holy, sent its quivering reflection, like a molten flood of lava, across the mirror of Saint Mary's Lake. The mob of a distant town had risen, drunk with besotted fury, and, hurrying up the glen with shouts of menace and ribald oaths, testified the sincerity of their conversion by an act of fearful sacrilege!

. . . . . .

I have sate there many a long hour—and yet they seemed all short—of the dreamy summer afternoon, trying once more to rebuild, in fancy, that stately chapel from the mouldering ruins of the past. It was as though I heard a bell ringing in the wilderness, and on either side the pillars rose up in slender shafts, and carved arches met above, and sweet tranquil faces of angels looked down from between their folded wings. There stood the priest before the altar, his vestments stained with the particoloured light streaming through the emblazoned window. Slowly he turned, and as he raised the Host, all the mighty throng of worshippers around me fell upon their knees, and I too knelt down, for the inspiration of the place was upon me.

. . . . . .

When again I looked up all the pageant was gone; melted like the castle of enchantment which disappeared at the approach

of Sir Roland in the wondrous valley of Saint John. Yet there were the ruins, and there the quiet graves, and through that very desolation the place appeared to me more deeply consecrated. The work of men's hands had passed away, but the earth retained its own—the seed committed to its bosom until the day of the final harvest. Believe me, it is a good thing for a man to pass an hour in such a place as that, where, with the wrecks of ancient piety around him, he may ponder upon the mighty mystery of death.

It is no exaggeration to say that these imaginary conversations give a faithful picture of Aytoun's talk during the years between 1840 and 1848, when I knew him best.*

It was during these years that all his best ballads were written—"The Heart of the Bruce," "The Execu-

* His conversation in later years retained much of the same character, but its tone was naturally mellower and more subdued. On this point I am happy to be able to quote the opinion of so good a judge as his friend the Very Reverend Dean Ramsay:—"Aytoun was not a professed 'diner-out' and talker. He rather shrunk from the idea, and thought that there was a little too much of that element prominent in such men as Jeffrey, Sidney Smith, Mackintosh, &c. But he was most happy in conversation, very ready in retort, and would often make reference to a subject which others were discussing, after appearing little attentive to what was going on, of the wittiest and most pungent character. His humour in company was quiet and quaint, like his published pieces; and the tone of his voice was peculiarly pathetic, so that he could narrate a melancholy story with wonderful and touching effect. Any one who had never seen Aytoun might thus form an idea of his general manner and conversation by supposing what would be the ordinary talk of the man who wrote "How we got up the Glenmutchkin Railway," "How I became a Yeoman," "Glencoe," and "Flodden." Pathos and humour combined in him to form a character to whom we might well apply the beautiful description of Biron, in Shakespeare's 'Love's Labour Lost'—

"A merrier man,
Within the limits of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour's talk withal."

tion of Montrose," "The Widow of Glencoe," and "Edinburgh after Flodden." Upon these he bestowed great care, rightly looking to them as the basis of his literary reputation. His lighter verses, both humorous and grave, were thrown off, as I had frequent occasion to see, almost with the rapidity of improvisation. One Christmas Eve, for example, as we sat together discussing a paper on which we were then engaged—now writing, now talking—the absence of all the features of a Christian festival from the Scottish Christmas happening to be spoken of, I said to him, Why not make this the theme of some verses for our paper? He took up his pen, and in a very few minutes threw across the table to me the following picturesque lines upon

THE SCOTTISH CHRISTMAS.

In truth it was a solemn show,
  The ancient Scottish Christmas-tide;
The holly and the mistletoe,
  And other boughs as green beside,
Within the altar and the rail;
  The offering of the stainless flowers,
And all the grateful heart's avail,
  For hope and promise such as ours.

But these have long since passed away,
  Beneath the cold Geneva ban;
No message brings that sacred day
  Of what was done and wrought for man.
A cheerless day! a gloomy time!
  Whereon no grateful thanks are given:
Unhallowed by the holy chime
  That ought to rise and welcome heaven.

A frost more chill than winter's sting
  Hath fall'n upon the northern moor;
And no glad voice does Christmas bring
  To stay the labours of the poor.
No anthem in the dead of night
  Awakes the shepherd from afar,
Nor can he see the radiant light
  That flashes from the promised Star.

Alone upon the wintry hill
  The banished angel sits and sighs,
Yet scans the weary midnight still
  With eager looks and tearful eyes.
The winds around are wailing low;
  They moan amidst the leafless tree;
And in the hollow cave below
  Is heard the washing of the sea.

The morning comes! O, joy to those
  Who know the wherefore of the dawn;
Why yonder east so brightly glows,
  And why the veil of night's withdrawn!
Old man, thy cheek is wan and pale;
  The load of years is hard on thee;
Look up above! "Of what avail
  Is any morning light to me?"

Around the girdle of the earth,
  Where'er the Cross hath ta'en its stand,
Arise the tidings of the birth
  That made the world one Holy Land!
Save where the faith is cold and faint,
  As are the northern rocks and snow,
Where sacred fane and honoured saint
  Have vanished with the long ago.

This was a subject on which Aytoun felt strongly; and wherever he so felt, his feeling found expression in

verse without effort. But he set little store himself by these chance effusions, and made no effort to preserve them.

Some of them are, however, worth preserving. There is much grace and beauty in the following lines, which were written for the album of Miss Helen Faucit. I scarcely remember to have seen Aytoun so deeply moved as by the impersonation which was their immediate cause. The trouble of his mind was more like that of a man who had been an actor in a real tragedy, than of any mere spectator "sitting at a play." But his emotion was probably too strong for him to trust himself to deal with the sadder aspect of Juliet's story, and so he confined himself to the passionate tenderness of its earlier phases.

THE JULIET.

I have been wandering in enchanted ground,
  The slave and subject, lady, of thy spell;
I heard thy voice, and straightway all around
  Became transformed, yet how I could not tell:
And through Verona's streets I took my way,
  Thronged with quaint masks and gallants many a one,
Amidst the sounds of revel and of fray,
  And saw bright weapons flashing in the sun.
So passed I on in marvel, till the night
  Cooled the red furnace of the southern sky,
And the sweet stars, all kindling into light,
  Burst through the vaulted darkness where they lie.
Hushed was the city and its varied din,
  As with a tremulous thrill, and half afraid,
I entered through a stately portal in
  To what might be a garden or a glade.

A soft voluptuous odour filled the spot
  From the rose-thickets, and the orange-bower;
And a tall fountain, bursting from its grot,
  Broke up the moonbeam in a pearly shower:
And then it was I heard the nightingale,
  Within the dark pomegranate-bower unseen,
Pour out the saddest and the tenderest wail,
  That ever filled with tears a lover's eyne;
When a low whisper stole upon my ear,
  With such angelic sweetness in its tone,
That my heart beat, as though a saint were near,
  And lost all sense of presence, save of one.
For there upon the balcony above,
  And whiter than the moonlight round her shining,
I saw the perfect form of maiden's love
  In the rapt fondness of her soul reclining;
And heard her speak in such impassioned strain,
  With so melodious yearning and divine,
That I shall never hear that tale again
  From other lips, dear lady, than from thine.

The following ballad, founded on the story of Lycaon as told by Ovid (Met., I. v. 207-243), was one of the many spirited things which Aytoun at this period used to dash off at a heat. Although never reprinted by himself, I know that he attached some value to it, and, as most readers will probably think, not without cause.

LYCAON.

Out spoke, then, Jove to the gods above,
  As they sate in their skyey hall,
"The deed is done, and the forfeit won,
  Then list my children all,

While I speak the crimes of those fearful times,
  Too black to be forgiven,
And the cry of wrath that rose from earth,
  And drew us down from heaven!

"In form and face like the human race,
  We hushed our thunders still,
And glided down from the hoary crown
  Of the high Olympian hill.
The world we made so fresh and fair
  Was now like a desert grown,
For the stain of blood was everywhere,
  And the altars were overthrown.

"We took our way, at the dawn of day,
  Over Mænalus dark and grim,
And we heard the howl of the beasts that prowl
  In Cyllene's forests dim.
We wandered through Lycœus, too,
  Swart with its pine-trees' shade,
And we reached the floor of the tyrant's door
  As the day began to fade.

"Then made we sign of our might divine,
  And the people straight kneeled down,
But Lycaon chafed at his subjects' faith,
  And checked them with his frown.
'The truth we'll test of this holy guest,'
  The tyrant thus began;
'And if his powers be more than ours,
  Let the god eclipse the man!'

"He thought to creep when all men sleep,
  Armed with a trenchant blade,
And pierce the heart of the stranger wight,
  In his own pavilion laid.
But first to try if a heavenly eye
  Could fathom his foul design,
He stained his hand in a mortal's blood,
  Ere he bathed it red in mine.

"A herald lay in his house that day,
  A nation's pledge to him,
But the caitiff slew him as he slept,
  And hewed him limb from limb!
With care he dressed that odious feast,
  Then with a horrid sneer
He bade us come to the banquet-room
  And taste his royal cheer.

"In my righteous ire I made the fire
  Through the vaulted dwelling roar,
And hurled the foul Penates down
  On their master's tainted floor.
In fear and dismay he fled away
  To the forest solitudes,
And howled alone like a guilty ghost,
  In the wild Arcadian woods.

"For days and days he wandered there,
  A wretch by heaven accurst;
The vicious foam from his black lips flew,
  And his soul was mad with thirst.
He cried for blood, he raved for blood,
  Till a fearful change began,
And he turned to rend the peaceful flocks,
  And lost the shape of man.

"His shoulders bare were clothed with hair,
  His limbs grew long and lean,
Yet still you might trace on his wolfish face
  What once the wretch had been.
The grisly locks were hard and stiff,
  The eye was cold and keen,
And the savage sneer of Lycaon's mouth
  In the famished wolf was seen!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURNS FESTIVAL, AND HIS SPEECH THERE—ANECDOTE OF DOUGLAS JERROLD—THE RAILWAY MANIA—PUBLICATION OF "THE GLENMUTCHKIN RAILWAY," AND ITS EFFECTS—RAILWAY LEGISLATION AND PARLIAMENTARY EVIDENCE—A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE—"RAILWAY CALLS," A SKETCH—RAILWAY TRAVELLING CONTRASTED WITH THAT IN OLDEN TIMES—STAGE BURLESQUES, AND RECIPE FOR ONE OF THESE—TIECK'S PHANTASUS—A SURREY MELODRAMA—ASTLEY'S AS IT WAS.

At the great Burns Festival, celebrated on the banks of the Doon in August 1844, Aytoun was invited to take a part in the proceedings. Lord Eglinton presided, and proposed "The Memory of Burns." It was the first time his lordship had addressed a large body of his countrymen, but by his speech upon that occasion he established a hold upon their hearts which was strengthened by every future act of his useful and honourable career. His points were few and admirably chosen. Every sentence told. The address was brief, graphic, and full of glow—the model of a speech for such a meeting. There was genius in the use of the word "repentant," when he alluded to the neighbouring monument "which an admiring and repentant people had raised to the poet." The felicity of the epithet was testified in the perceptible thrill with which it

was answered in the breasts of all present. Nor could a more graceful compliment have been paid by rank to genius, than when he spoke of the descendant of those who dwelt in "the Castle of Montgomery" as "feeling himself only too highly honoured in being permitted to propose the memory of him who had wandered then unknown upon the banks of Ayr."

Lord Eglinton sounded a prelude not unworthy of the eloquence of Wilson, by which his speech was followed. Magnificent, indeed, was that eloquence, such as one might not again in a lifetime hope to hear. The whole strength and fervour of a great and matured mind irradiated by a sublime imagination was in it. Now it rose and swelled with majestic conceptions, clothed in majestic words, "like that large utterance of the early gods;" now it struck chords of tenderness that blinded the eyes with tears. Again, it made them rich with images of grandeur and beauty, scattering, as it proceeded on its stately way, flowers of poetry and of thought, till the attention almost failed under the luxuriance of its wealth. Wilson never showed to greater advantage than on this occasion. His whole heart was in his task. As he stood there with his Jovelike presence, and that far-away look in his eyes which used to come into them when his imagination was fairly roused, rolling out his resonant periods with his rich, penetrating voice, he seemed, indeed,

"Attired
With sudden brightness, like a man inspired."

After Wilson's magnificent *oraison funèbre*, all other orations appeared tame and thin. "The Memory of the Ettrick Shepherd and Allan Cunningham" was the toast intrusted to Aytoun. He spoke of them thus:—

I have now, in a few words, to entreat your patience whilst I speak of two other Scottish poets whose memory is yet green amongst us—both reared, like Robert Burns, at the lowly hearth of the peasant—both pursuing, like him, through every discouragement and difficulty, the pathway towards honourable renown—and both the authors of strains which bear the stamp of immortality. And first, let me allude to one of them whom I knew and dearly loved. Who is there that has not heard of the Ettrick Shepherd—of him whose inspiration descended as lightly as the breeze that blows along the mountain-side—who saw, amongst the lonely and sequestered glens of the south, from eyelids touched with fairy ointment, such visions as are vouchsafed to the minstrel alone—the dream of sweet Kilmeny, too spiritual for the taint of earth? I shall not attempt any comparison—for I am not here to criticise—between his genius and that of other men, on whom God in His bounty has bestowed the great and the marvellous gift. The songs and the poetry of the Shepherd are now the nation's own, as indeed they long have been; and amidst the minstrelsy of the choir who have made the name of Scotland and her peasantry familiar throughout the wide reach of the habitable world, the clear wild notes of the Forest will for ever be heard to ring. I have seen him many times by the banks of his own romantic Yarrow; I have sat with him in the calm and sunny weather by the margin of St Mary's Lake; I have seen his eye sparkle and his cheek flush as he spoke out some old heroic ballad of the days of the Douglas and the Græme; and I have felt, as I listened to the accents of his manly voice, that whilst Scotland could produce amongst her children such men as him beside me, her ancient spirit had not departed from her, nor the star of her glory grown pale! For he was a man, indeed, cast in nature's happiest mould. True-

hearted, and brave, and generous, and sincere, alive to every kindly impulse, and fresh at the core to the last, he lived among his native hills the blameless life of the shepherd and the poet; and on the day when he was laid beneath the sod in the lonely kirkyard of Ettrick, there was not one dry eye amongst the hundreds that lingered round his grave. Of the other sweet singer, too—of Allan Cunningham, the leal-hearted and kindly Allan—I might say much; but why should I detain you further? Does not his name alone recall to your recollection many a sweet song that has thrilled the bosom of the village maiden with an emotion that a princess need not blush to own? Honour, then, to the poets!—whether they speak out loud and trumpet-tongued, to find audience in the hearts of the great, and the mighty, and the brave—or whether, in lowlier and more simple accents, but not less sacred in their mission, they bring comfort and consolation to the poor. As the sweep of the rainbow, which has its arch in heaven and its shafts resting upon the surface of the earth—as the sunshine which falls with equal bounty upon the palace and the hut—is the all-pervading and universal spirit of poetry; and what less can we do to those men who have collected and scattered it around us, than to hail them as the benefactors of their race?

The speeches on this memorable occasion were thought worthy of a permanent record in the pages of 'Blackwood,' where they appeared in September 1844, preceded by an account of the festival, which was written by Aytoun.*

* On the occasion of this festival I walked with Douglas Jerrold from Ayr to the Pavilion, where the meeting was held. His talk, as usual, sparkled with good things. One stroke of his humour—for he had humour as well as wit, in no common degree—is all I can remember. As we crossed a narrow country road, down which a procession of Mauchline weavers, or Kilmarnock cap-makers, or some such body, was pouring, preceded by music, which was neither "princely," nor "unbedinned with drums," a farmer's horse, frightened by the crowd and noise, began to curvet and prance uneasily. "For heaven's sake!"

About this time what has since been known as the "railway mania" had begun to set in. The great lines of communication, so far as completed and in operation, were yielding very high dividends, and it had become apparent that their extension throughout the country was indispensable to its prosperity. The success with which several legitimate enterprises had been launched, was followed by the projection of schemes solely for the purposes of speculation on the Stock Exchange. Money changed hands more rapidly than in the saloons of Baden-Baden and Ems; and simple people who heard of sudden fortunes made by speculation in scrip and shares, were tempted to stake their means in a game where the odds against them were heavier than in the halls of Messieurs Benazet and Leblanc. There, at all events, the odds are avowed, and the game openly played; but who was safe against the secret rascalities of stock-jobbers, or the elaborately systematised mysteries of rigging the market? When the mania spread to Scotland, it broke out with peculiar intensity. Once fairly roused, the Scottish *perfervidum ingenium* carries the people with headlong earnestness for good or evil

exclaimed Jerrold, dragging me aside, "get out of his way; he's dangerous. *He's seen oats to-day.*" Seen oats! as if his master, yielding to the generous enthusiasm of the day, had excited his "yawd" by the rare vision of so costly a luxury, but, in his Scottish parsimony, had driven the animal wild by refusing to let it do more than see the stimulating grains. Jerrold was just Cockney enough to give a kind of half faith to the notion that Scotland was a land of hunger and semi-barbarism, such as Wilkes and Churchill had drawn it. The Scotch can afford to enjoy their wit and his without soreness at the injustice which lies at the bottom of it.

into whatever they undertake. "Cannie Scot," like many other proverbial phrases, is a mistake. Cautious he unquestionably is up to a certain point; but let his blood be only warmed, and there is no race of men more rash, more reckless of consequences, than the Scotch. This was signally proved in those excited times. All classes of people were bitten by the love of speculation. Scrip and premium were in all men's mouths. Extensions, competing lines, and the whole excited jargon of the Stock Exchange, became the familiar talk of men who had hitherto been conspicuous for plodding industry and most scrupulous caution. The most absurd schemes were projected. No district was too barren not to be the area of competing lines, the scrip for which was instantly run up to a premium. Anything, in short, served to operate upon in the market. Indeed, the more unlikely the enterprise to be carried out, the more extensively were its shares dealt in. The experienced jobbers, knowing that even if the scrip were left in their hands it would not be the subject of ruinous calls, pushed the speculation in them with greater recklessness, and gambled with them for higher stakes. Madness ruled the hour, till even those who had studied every move of the stock-jobbing game lost their heads and were caught in the toils they had spread without remorse for others. In the general excitement they held on too long; and many who, before they were surprised by the general crash which ensued in 1847, might have realised large fortunes, came out of it as bare

of feathers as the most simple of the pigeons whom they had helped to pluck.

Of this general game of Beggar-my-neighbour Aytoun was a close observer. Many of his immediate circle of friends had gone deeply into it. He saw its pernicious influence upon the habits of "many worthy fellows," who, as he used afterwards to say, were "out in the '45;" and he was too well versed in economical science not to foresee very clearly the disastrous results to which the universal scramble after sudden wealth could not fail to lead. At first, and before he became aware of the extent to which the mischief had spread, or of the rascally devices by which bubble schemes were forced upon the public, he dealt with the subject in a purely jocular spirit—as in his sketch, "My First Spec in the Biggleswades,"* most of the actors in which were real personages under a very faint disguise. But as the fever of speculation grew worse and worse, and the projects of those who traded upon it more rascally, Aytoun determined to let in some light upon the rottenness of the system, and help to arrest the folly which he saw carrying thousands to inevitable ruin. With this view he wrote, "How we got up the Glenmutchkin Railway, and how we got out of it." Never was truth more pithily told, nor a good purpose better served under the disguise of humour. People laughed at the tale, but it made them think. Knavish projectors saw their infamous system laid bare; and their miserable dupes stood aghast at the folly which had made them

* See Appendix.

the easy prey of the M'Corkindales and the Dunshunners. The 'Times' reprinted the paper at full length, delighted to have the warnings so emphatically backed which it had for a long time been preaching in vain. "Glenmutchkin" became a byword for every outrageous project; and ridicule slew what had been proof against the assaults of the strongest argument. The demon, it is true, was only laid for a period; and when he rose again, he spread his snares under another guise. Unhappily there has arisen no second Aytoun to show up, with the same force of sarcasm, the gigantic rascalities of railway "financing," and to fix for immortal infamy the lineaments of the men who have carried on under that name a system of falsehood and fraud which has desolated the homes and blighted the lives of thousands in these later days.

Railway politics and railway legislation were a favourite topic with Aytoun. Of the latter he saw a good deal between the years 1845 and 1849, in the course of his practice, which was considerable, as counsel on Scotch railway bills before Parliamentary committees. He attacked the abuses of the system which then prevailed in numerous articles in 'Blackwood,' pointing out, in his half-jocular half-serious way, the extravagant cost of the inquiries, the unscrupulous character of much of the evidence, and the cruel hardships to which proprietors were often subjected in defending their property from invasion. Great reforms have since been effected in the practice, but much of what was then written is still true. For instance, the

substantial accuracy of the following amusing picture of the evidence for and against a railway bill is not affected by the vein of humorous exaggeration which runs through it:—

It is the richest thing in the world to see two crack engineers pitted against each other. The first, who appears on behalf of the line, does not know and cannot conceive the slightest engineering difficulty. If a mountain stands in his way, he plunges fearlessly into its bowels, finds in the interior strata of surpassing mineral wealth, yet marvellously adapted for the purposes of a four-mile tunnel, and brings you out sound and safe at the opposite side, as though he had been perforating a gigantic cheese instead of hammering his path through whinstone coeval with the creation. If a lake stands in the way, he will undertake to drain it, with immense advantage to the neighbouring proprietors. If a valley intervenes, he will bridge it with a viaduct which shall put to shame the grandest relics of antiquity. He has no knowledge of such bugbears as steep gradients or dangerous curves; a little hocus-pocus with the compasses transforms all these into gentle undulations and sweeps of the most graceful description. He will run you his rails right through the heart of the most populous city—yea, even Glasgow herself—and across the streets, without the slightest interruption to the traffic. He will contrive so that the hissing of the locomotive shall be as grateful a sound as the plashing of a fountain in the midst of our bisected squares; and he is indignant at the supposition that any human being can be besotted enough to prefer the prospect of a budding garden to a clean double pair of rails beneath his bedroom window, with a jolly train steaming it along at the rate of some fifty miles per hour.

The opposing engineer has a contrary story to tell. He has the utmost confidence in the general ability of his scientific friend, but on this occasion he has the misfortune to differ in opinion. Very carefully has he gone over the whole of the line surveyed. He is sorry to say that the gradients are utterly impossible, and the curves approaching to a circle. Tunnelling is

out of the question. How are two miles of quicksand and two of basaltic rock to be gone through? The first is deeper than the Serbonian Bog, and would swallow up the whole British army. The second could not be pierced in a shorter time than Pharaoh took to construct the pyramids of Egypt. He considers a railway in the heart of a town to be an absolute and intolerable nuisance; and, on the whole, looking at the plan before him, he has come to the conclusion, that a more dangerous and impracticable line was never yet laid before a committee of the United Parliament of Great Britain.

So much for the engineering Hector and Achilles. Out of these two opinions, of necessity, must the five respectable members on the bench form their judgment; for of themselves they know nothing, having been purposely selected on account of their superior ignorance. Cross-examination makes the matter still worse. A cantankerous waspish counsel, with the voice of an exasperated cockatoo, endeavours to make the opposing engineer contradict himself. He might as well try to turn Ailsa Crag. He of the impossible gradients is the hero of a hundred committees, quite accustomed to legal artifice, cool, wary, and self-collected. He receives every thrust with a pleasant smile, and sometimes returns them with damaging effect. If close pressed, he is conscious that behind him is a thicket of algebra, into which neither counsel nor judges will dare to follow; and so fortified by the mysteries of his calling, he is ready to defy the universe. Then come the hordes of subordinate witnesses, the gentlemen who are to give evidence for and against the bill. One side represents the country as abounding in mineral produce and agricultural wealth; the other likens it unto Patmos, or the Stony Arabia. Tims swears that the people of his district are mad, insane, rabid in favour of the line. Jenkins, his next-door neighbour, on the contrary, protests that if the rails were laid down to-morrow, they would be torn up by an insurrection of the populace *en masse*. John thinks the Dreepdaily Extension is the only one at all suited to supply the wants of the country; Sandy opines that the Powheads Junction is the true and genuine potato; and both John and Sandy, Tims and Jenkins, are backed by a host of corroborators. Then come the

speeches of the counsel, and rare specimens they are of unadulterated oratory. I swear to you, Bogle, that, no later than a week ago, I listened to such a picture of Glasgow and the Clyde, from the lips of a gentleman eminent alike in law and letters, as would have thrown a diorama of Damascus into the shade. He had it all, sir, from the orchards of Clydesdale to the banks of Bothwell, the pastoral slopes of Ruglen, and the emerald solitudes of the Green. The river flowed down towards the sea in translucent waves of crystal. From the parapets of the bridge you watched the salmon cleaving their way upwards in vivid lines of light. Never did Phœbus beam upon a lovelier object than the fair suburb of the Gorbals, as seen from the Broomielaw, reposing upon its shadow in perfect stillness. Then came the forests of masts, the activity of the dockyards, and

> "The impress of shipwrights, whose hard toil
> Doth scarce divide the Sunday from the week."

Farther down, the villas of the merchant princes burst upon your view, each of them a perfect Sirmio—then Port-Glasgow, half-spanned by the arch of a dissolving rainbow—Dumbarton, grand and solemn as became the death-place of the Bruce—Ben Lomond, with its hoary head swathed in impenetrable clouds—and lo! the ocean and the isles. Not a Glasgow man in the committee-room but yearned with love and admiration towards the gifted speaker, who certainly did make out a case for the Queen of the West such as no matter-of-fact person could possibly have believed. And all this was done by merely substituting a Claude Lorraine glass for our ordinary dingy atmosphere. The outline was most correct and graphic, but the secret lay in the handling and distribution of the colours. I shall not wonder if the whole committee, clerk included, come down this autumn to catch a glimpse of that terrestrial paradise. *

The following sketch was also founded in fact. Happily the state of things which it depicts would now be impossible. It occurs in a letter from Mr

* "Letter from London, by a Railway Witness."—'Blackwood's Magazine' for August 1845.

Reginald Dunshunner, describing his experiences as a railway witness to his friend Bogle in Glasgow.

Would you believe it, Bogle? I was giving evidence yesterday on behalf of the Clachandean Railway—part of which, I am sorry to observe, has sunk into the centre of a bog—against a thick-headed proprietor, who has absolutely been insane enough to oppose, for three successive sessions, a branch line, which is to run through his estate for the purpose of communicating with some bathing-machines. The property has been in his family for some four or five hundred years. The mansion-house is an ordinary kind of tumble-down old affair, with turrets like pepper-boxes on the corners, and the fragment of an abbey behind it. There is no timber worth speaking of in the policy, except half-a-dozen great useless yew-trees, beneath which they show you a carved stone that covers the dust of stout old Lord Alexander, whose body was brought home from the bloody field of Flodden;—and yet this absurd agriculturist has the coolness to propose to the company that they shall make a deviation of nearly half a mile, for the sake of avoiding this remnant of the darker ages! Three times, Bogle, has that man come up to London, at a most enormous expense, for the purpose of defending his property. The first time he was successful in his opposition before the committee of the House of Commons, because the chairman happened to be a person imbued with the same ridiculous prejudices as the proprietor, and was what these foolish Protectionists call a man of birth and connection. He had on his own grounds a mausoleum with some rubbishy remains of his ancestors, who had been out with Harry Hotspur; and the moment he heard of the old tombstone and the yew-trees, he began to rave about desecration, and made such a row that the projectors were fain to give it up. That job cost the Protectionist proprietor at least a cool thousand; however, he was pleased to say that he did not mind the expense, since he had succeeded in saving the mansion of his fathers. But we did not by any means intend to let him off so easily. My friend Switches, the engineer, laid out two new branches—if possible more annoying than the first, for they were to intersect one

another at the yew-trees. We tipped the Parliamentary notices; and though the venerable Cincinnatus came with tears in his eyes to our directors, and offered them the land for nothing if they would only consent to a very slight and practicable deviation, we determined to make him pay for his whistle. Accordingly, next year we had him up again, all right and tight, before a fresh committee. Lord! what fun it was to hear him cross-examined by Sergeant Squashers! That's the counsel for my money!—no feeling, or delicacy, or nonsense of that kind about him. I wish you had seen the rage of the proprietor when he was asked about his buried ancestor; whether his name was Sawney, or Sandy—and whether he was embalmed with sulphur! We all roared with laughter. "Don't attempt to bully me, sir!" said the Sergeant,—for the red spot began to glow upon the old man's cheek, and I believe that at that moment, if he had had a weapon, he could have driven it hilt-deep into the body of the facetious barrister. "Don't attempt to bully me, sir! thank Heaven, we are in a civilised country, where people wear breeches, and live under the protection of the law. Answer me, sir—and try to do it in something like intelligible English—was that fellow, Lord Saunders or Sawney, or whatever you call him, pickled up in brimstone or in pitch?" Squaretoes could not stand this; so he gathered himself up, I must say rather grandly—muttered something about scorn, and Squashers being a disgrace to the gown he wore, and marched out of the committee room amidst the guffaws of a group of us who were brought up to testify that the house was falling to pieces, and that no Christian of ordinary intellect would trust his carcass beneath its roof.

That time we had a capital chairman—a regular man of calico, who never professed to have a grandfather, hated the agriculturists like the pestilence, and had made a large fortune by the railways. He was perfectly delighted at the way in which our friend the Sergeant had put down Sir Pertinax M'Sycophant—a nickname suggested by our solicitor, and employed in the learned counsel's reply with very considerable effect; and as there were two other members of the League on the committee, we had it all our own way. The preamble was declared to be proved, and no clauses of compensation were allowed. But if we

were obstinate in our purpose, so was Pertinax. He fought us in the House of Lords, and there, to be sure, he got what he termed justice—that is, our bill was thrown out, and some rather harsh expressions used with respect to the company's behaviour. We were ten days before each committee—for Squashers is rather fond of spinning out a case, and none of us who are paid for attendance by the day are in the habit of objecting to the same—so that Pertinax must have been out of pocket at least two thousand pounds by this second silly opposition. And considering that the fortunes of the family are not so flourishing as they once were, and that the old fellow can barely afford to give his son a university education, you will admit that that this must have been a tolerable pull at his purse-strings. However, we were determined to keep it up. The wisdom of the Legislature in refusing, under any circumstances whatever, to give costs against the railways, has put it in the power of a company to drive any individual, by unremitting perseverance, to the wall. We set Switches to work again, and this time we propose to metamorphose the mansion into a station-house. I don't know how the thing will go. Old Pertinax is fighting like a Trojan; and I rather fear that he made a little impression on the committee yesterday, by telling them that he has been obliged to borrow money upon his estate at a ruinous rate of interest, and to endanger the portions of his three pretty and motherless daughters solely to defend his patrimony from the wanton aggressions of the company. But—as Sergeant Squashers well observed when he saw a tear stealing down the furrowed cheek of the Protectionist—this is not the age nor the place for such imbecile snivelling. We have been taught a new lesson with regard to the sacredness of rights and of property; and the sooner those antiquated hereditary notions are kicked out of the minds of the landowners, the better.*

Had it fallen to Aytoun's lot to write the history of the great railway mania, the mad whirl of excitement which then agitated the public mind, and the

* 'Blackwood's Magazine,' July 1847.

widespread suffering with which the delusion was expiated, he would have produced a most animated and interesting book. He had watched closely all the stages of the disease from fever to prostration. The former he had painted to perfection in some of his minor sketches, and in more than one of his later papers in 'Blackwood' he sketched with a graphic pencil the miseries of the unhappy myriads who were drained of their means for the execution of the lines of railway which were thus projected.

Who has forgotten—he writes in one of those papers *—the misery of those times, when letters of railway calls arrived punctually once a quarter? Two pound ten per share might be a moderate instalment; but if you were the unfortunate holder of a hundred shares, you had better have been boarded with a vampire. Repudiation, though a clear Christian duty to yourself and your family, was utterly impossible. It mattered not that the majority of the original committeemen and directors had bolted; you, the subscriber, were tied to the stake. The work was begun, the contracts opened, and money must be had at all hazards and sacrifices. You found yourself in the pitiable situation of an involuntary philanthropist. Threescore hulking Irish navvies were daily fed, liquored, and lodged at your expense. Your dwindling resources were torn from you, to make the fortunes of engineers and contractors. So long as you had a penny, or a convertible equivalent, you were forced to surrender it. Your case was precisely similar to that of the Jew incarcerated in the vaults beneath the royal treasury of King John. One by one all your teeth were drawn. If you managed to survive the extraction of the last grinder, and to behold the opening of the line, your position was not one whit improved. Dividend, of course, there was none. That awful and mysterious item of charge, "working expenses," engulfed nearly the whole revenue.

* "The Champions of the Rail," 'Blackwood's Magazine,' Dec. 1851.

What was over went to pay interest on preference debentures. That gallant body of men, the directors, laid before you, with the utmost candour, a state of the affairs of the company; from which it appeared that they had exceeded their borrowing powers by perhaps a brace of millions, and had raised the money by interposing their own individual security. These obligations you were, of course, expected to redeem; and an appeal was made to your finer feelings, urging you to consent to a further issue of stock!

What compensation is it—he continues—to a man who has gone through this process of torture, that his fortune has gone to the establishment of great lines of internal communication, along which men may be whirled with the velocity of a rocket? Did the Israelites, who built them, take any especial pride in surveying the pile of the pyramids? And what, after all, is the use of this confounded hurry? In a railway carriage you have no fair view of the fresh aspect of nature: you dash through the landscape—supposing that there is one—before its leading features are impressed upon your mind. There is no time for details, or even for reflection. You must accommodate your thought to your pace, otherwise you are left behind, and see nothing whatever for at least a couple of stations. But for the most part your way lies between embankments and cuttings, representing either sections of whinstone, or bare banks of turf, dotted over with brown patches, where the engine has effected arson. Even furze will not willingly flourish in such an uncomfortable locality. Then you roar through tunnels, the passage of which makes your flesh creep—for you cannot divest yourself of a horrid idea that you may possibly be encountered in the centre of the darkness by an opposing engine, and be pounded into paste by the shock of that terrific tilt; or that a keystone of the arch may give way, and the whole train be buried in the centre of the excavated mountain. Sensual gratification there is none. You are driven by the pangs of sheer hunger into the refreshment-room at some station, and find yourself at the bar of an inferior gin palace. Very bad is the pork-pie, for which you are charged an exorbitant ransom. Call ye this sherry, my masters? If it be so, commend us for the future to Bucellas. The oranges look well outside, but the

moment you have penetrated the rind, you find that they have been boiled and are fozy. Do not indulge in the vain hope that you may venture on a glass of anything hot. Hot enough you will find it with a vengeance; for, the instant you receive the tumbler, the bell is sure to ring, and you must either scald your throat by gulping down two mouthfuls of mahogany-water raised to a temperature which would melt solder, or consign the prepaid potion to the leisure of the attendant Hebe. Under such circumstances, literature is a poor resource. You read the 'Times' twice over, advertisements and all, and then sink into a feverish slumber, from which you are awakened by a demand from a ruffian in blue livery, with a glazed leather belt across his shoulder, for the exhibition of your ticket. Talk of the inconvenience of passports abroad! The Continental system is paradisiacal compared with ours. At length, after fingering your watch with an insane desire to accelerate its movement, you run into the ribs of something which resembles the skeleton of a whale—the train stops—and you know that your journey is at an end. You select your luggage, after having undergone the scrutiny of a member of the police force, who evidently thinks that he has seen you before under circumstances of considerable peculiarity, ensconce yourself in a cab, and drive off, being favoured at the gate of the station by a shower of diminutive pamphlets, purporting to be poetical tributes to the merits of Messrs Moses and Hyam. You have done the distance in twelve hours, but pleasure you have had none.

. . . . . .

Was nature made in vain, in order that men might hasten from town to town, at the tail of a shrieking engine, regardless of all the glorious scenery which intervenes? To our taste, the old mode of travelling—nay, the oldest—was infinitely superior to the present sickening system. You rose by times in the morning; took a substantial breakfast of beef and ale—none of your miserable slops—and mounted your horse between your saddle-bags, in time to hear the lark carolling on his earliest flight to heaven. Your way ran through dingle and thicket, along the banks of rivers, skirting magnificent parks, rich in the possession of primeval oaks, under which the deer lay tranquilly and still.

You entered a village, stopped at the door of the public-house, and cooled your brow in the foam of the wholesome homebrewed. You dined at mid-day, in some town where the execrable inventions of Arkwright and Watt were unknown; where you encountered only honest, healthy, rosy-cheeked Christians, who went regularly once a-week to church, and identified the devil with the first Dissenter—instead of meeting gangs of hollow-eyed lean mechanics, talking radicalism, and discussing the fundamental points of the Charter. You moved through merry England as a man ought to do, who is both content with his own lot and can enjoy the happiness of others. As you saw the sun rising, so you saw him set. The clouds reddened in the west—you heard the sweet carol of the thrush from the coppice, and lingered to catch the melody. The shades of evening grew deeper. The glow-worms lit their tiny lanterns on the bank, the owl flitted past with noiseless wing, the village candles began to appear in the distance; and as you dismounted at the door of your humble inn, and surrendered your weary beast to the hands of the careful ostler, you felt that you were the richer by a day spent in the fresh air and gladsome sunshine, and made happy by all the sounds and sights which are dear to the heart of man.

But this was solitary travelling, and might not suit every one. Well—if you were a little fellow, deficient in pluck, and sorely afraid of robbers, you might have company for the asking. At every large inn on the road there were at least a dozen travellers who, for the sake of security, agreed to journey in company. Was that no fun? Have you anything like it in your modern railways? Just compare your own experiences of a rocket-flight along the Great Western with Chaucer's delineation of his Canterbury pilgrimage, and you will see what you have lost. Nice sort of tales you would elicit either from that beetle-browed Bradford Free-Trader, evidently a dealer in devil's-dust, who is your *vis-à-vis* in the railway carriage; or from that singular specimen of a nun who is ogling you deliberately on the left! Can you associate the story of Palamon and Arcite—can you connect anything which is noble, lofty, inspiriting, humane, or gentle, with a journey made in an express train? If not, so much the worse for the present times.

Fond as Aytoun was of humour, and indeed because he was fond of it, he held in profound contempt the spurious fun, compounded of slang and verbal quibbles, of the extravaganzas and burlesques which have been, now for so many years, supposed to do duty for it on the stage. Specimens of this kind of work which he saw in London in 1845, provoked the following characteristic expression of disgust. As, in comparison with the degraded trash of the same kind by which they have been succeeded, these might be pronounced absolutely brilliant in allusion, pure in taste, and classical in style, the following burst of indignation is more than ever appropriate :—

After all, is it to be wondered at if the public lacketh novelty? Shakespeare has had possession of the stage for nearly two centuries—quite enough, one would think, to pacify his unconscionable *Manes*. We have been dosed with his dramas from our youth upwards. Two generations of the race of Kean have, in our own day, perished, after a series of air-stabs, upon Bosworth field. We have seen twenty different Hamlets appear upon the damp chill platform of Elsinore, and fully as many Romeos in the sunny streets of Verona. The nightingale in the pomegranate-tree was beginning to sing hoarsely and out of tune, therefore it was full time that our ears should be dieted with other sounds. Well, no sooner was the wish expressed, than we were presented with the 'Legend of Florence,' 'Nina Sforza,' and several other dramas of the highest class. Sheridan Knowles and Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton professed themselves ready to administer any amount of food to the craving appetite of the age—but all in vain. Tragedy was not what we wanted—nor comedy—no, nor even passable melodrama. We sighed for something of a more ethereal sort, and—laud we the gods!—the manna has descended in showers. Go into any of the London theatres now, and the following is your bill of fare:

Fairies you have by scores in flesh-coloured tights, spangles, and paucity of petticoats; gnomes of every description, from the gigantic glittering diamond beetle to the grotesque and dusky tadpole. Epicene princes, whose taper limbs and swelling busts are well worth the scrutiny of the opera-glass—dragons vomiting at once red flames and witticisms about the fountains in Trafalgar Square—Dan O'Connell figuring in the feathers of a Milesian owl—and the Seven Champions of Christendom smoking cigars upon the parapets of Hungerford Bridge! Such is the intellectual banquet which London, queen of literature, presents to her fastidious children!

The form of dramatic composition now most in vogue is the burlesque; or, in the language of the great Planché, "the original, grand, comic, romantic, operatic, melo-dramatic, fairy extravaganza!" There is a title for you, that would have put Polonius to the blush. I have invested some three shillings in the purchase of several of these works, in order that I might study at leisure the bold and brilliant wit, the elegant language, and the ingenious metaphors which had entranced me when I heard them uttered from the stage. I am now tolerably master of the subject, and therefore beg leave to hand you a recipe for the concoction of one of these delectable dishes. Take my advice, and make the experiment yourself. Select a fairy tale, or a chapter from the Arabian Nights; write out the *dramatis personæ*, taking care that you have plenty of supernaturals, genii, elves, gnomes, ghouls, or vampires, to make up a competent *corps de ballet;* work out your dialogue in slipshod verse, with as much slang repartee as you possibly can cram in, and let every couplet contain either a pun or some innuendo upon the passing events of the day. This in London is considered as the highest species of wit, and seldom fails to bring down three distinct rounds of applause from the galleries. I fear you may be trammelled a little by the scantiness of local allusions. Hungerford Bridge and Trafalgar Square, as I have already hinted, have kept the Cockneys in roars of laughter for years, and are dragged forward with unrelenting perseverance, but still undiminished effect, in each successive extravaganza. I suspect you will find that the population of Glasgow are less easy to be

tickled, and somewhat jealous of quips at their familiar haunts. However, don't be down-hearted. Go boldly at the Gorbals, the Goosedubs, and the great chimney-stalk of St Rollox; it is impossible to predict how boldly the municipal pulse may bound beneath the pressure of a dexterous finger. Next, you must compose some stanzas, as vapid as you please, to be sung by the leading virgin in pantaloons; or, what is better still, a few parodies adapted to the most popular airs. I see a fine field for your ingenuity in the Jacobite relics; they are entwined with our most sacred national recollections, and therefore may be desecrated at will. Never lose sight for a moment of the manifold advantages derivable from a free use of the trap-door and the flying-wires; throw in a transparency, an Elysian field, a dissolving view, and a miniature Vesuvius, and

"My basnet to a 'prentice cap,"

you will take all Glasgow by storm, and stand henceforward crowned as the young Euripides of the West.

You and I, in the course of our early German studies, lighted, as I can well remember, upon the Phantasus of Ludwig Tieck. I attribute your loss of the first prize in the moral philosophy class to the enthusiasm with which you threw yourself into his glorious Bluebeard and Fortunatus. In truth it was like hearing the tales of childhood told anew, only with a manlier tone, and a clearer and more dignified purpose. How lucidly the early, half-forgotten images were restored under the touch of that inimitable artist! What a luxury it was to revel with the first favourites of our childhood, now developed into full life and strength and stately beauty! With these before us, how could we dare be infidels and recreants to our earlier faith, or smile in scorn at the fanciful loves and cherished dreams of infancy? Such were our feelings, nor could it well be otherwise; for Tieck was, and is, a poet of the highest grade—not a playwright and systematic jest-hunter; and would as soon have put forth his hand in impious challenge against the Ark, as have stooped to become a buffooning pander to the idle follies of the million. It remained for England,—great and classic England—no, by heavens! I will not do her that wrong—but for London, and London *artists!*—I believe

that is the proper phrase,—after having exhausted every other subject of parody, sacred and profane, to invade the sanctuary of childhood, and vulgarise the very earliest impressions which are conveyed to the infant. Are not the men who sit down deliberately to such a task more culpable than even the nursery jade who administers gin and opium to her charge, in order that she may steal to the back-door undisturbed, and there indulge in surreptitious dalliance with the dustman? Far better had they stuck to their old trade of twisting travesties from Shakespeare for the amusement of elderly idiots, than attempted to people Fairyland with the palpable denizens of St Giles. The Seven Champions of Christendom, indeed! They may well lay claim to the title of Champions of Cockneydom incarnate, setting forth on their heroic quest from the rendezvous in the Seven Dials.*

While Aytoun shrunk from the manufactured witticisms and vulgarity of burlesques, the extravagances of melodrama always had the greatest possible charm for him. "The terrible Fitzball," and Widdicomb the immortal, were two of his favourite heroes. He revelled in the wild improbabilities of a Surrey domestic drama; and while Astley's was yet Astley's, he never came to London without paying it a visit. The fascinations of that home of the equestrian drama are now among the faded splendours of the past; and the following sketch of what was still to be seen there in 1846, while it will revive recollections not unpleasant to some, can scarcely fail to amuse all by the vivid force of its description and the imaginative glow of the style:—

As a general rule, we prefer the spectacles on the Surrey side to those exhibited in the Metropolitan or Westminster districts.

* "A Letter from London."—'Blackwood's Magazine,' August 1845.

There the nautical drama still flourishes in its pristine force. The old British tar, in ringlets, pumps, and oilskin castor, still hitches up his trousers with appropriate oath; revolves the unfailing bolus of pigtail in his cheek; swims to shore across a tempestuous sea of canvass, with a pistol in each hand and a cutlass in his teeth, from the wreck of the foundering frigate; and sets foot once more on the British soil just in time to deliver Pretty Poll of Portsmouth, his affianced bride (who has a passion for short petticoats and crimson stockings), from the persecutions of that bebuttoned pirate with the whiskers, who carries more pistols in his girdle than the scalps of an Indian chief, and whose fall, after a terrific combat with basket-hilts and shower of fiery sparkles, brings down the curtain at the close of the third act amidst roars of unmitigated joy. Also we delight to see, at never-failing Astley's, the revived glories of British prowess—Wellington, in the midst of his staff, smiling benignantly upon the facetious pleasantries of a Fitzroy Somerset—Sergeant M'Craw of the Forty-second delighting the *élite* of Brussels by his performance of the reel of Tullochgorum at the Duchess of Richmond's ball—the charge of the Scots Greys—the single combat between Marshal Ney and the infuriated Life-Guardsman Shaw—and the final retreat of Napoleon amidst a volley of Roman candles, and the flames of an arseniated Hougomont. Nor is our gratification less to discern, after the subsiding of the shower of sawdust so gracefully scattered by that groom in the doeskin integuments, the stately form of Widdicomb, cased in martial apparel, advancing towards the centre of the ring, and commanding—with imperious gestures, and some slight flagellation in return for dubious compliment—the double-jointed clown to assist the Signora Cavalcanti to her seat upon the celebrated Arabian. How lovely looks the lady, as she vaults to her feet upon the breadth of the yielding saddle! With what inimitable grace does she whirl these tiny banners around her head, as winningly as a Titania performing the sword exercise! How coyly does she dispose her garments and floating drapery to hide the too-maddening symmetry of her limbs! Gods!—She is transformed all at once into an Amazon—the fawn-like timidity of her first demeanour is gone. Bold

and beautiful flushes her cheek with animated crimson—her full voluptuous lip is more compressed and firm—the deep passion of the huntress sparkles in her lustrous eye! Widdicomb becomes excited—he moves with quicker step around the periphery of his central circle—incessant is the smacking of his whip—not this time directed against Mr Merryman, who at his ease is enjoying a swim upon the sawdust—and lo! the grooms rush in, six bars are elevated in a trice, and over them all bounds the volatile Signora like a panther, nor pauses until, with airy somersets, she has passed twice through the purgatory of the blazing hoop, and then, drooping and exhausted, sinks like a Sabine into the arms of the herculean Master, who—a second Romulus—bears away his lovely burden to the stables, amidst such a whirlwind of applause as Kemble might have been proud to earn! *

* "New Scottish Plays and Poems."—'Blackwood's Magazine,' July 1846.

CHAPTER V.

APPOINTED PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES—HIS SUCCESS—HIS METHOD, AND CARE IN TRAINING HIS STUDENTS—NUMBER AND VARIETY OF HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO 'BLACKWOOD'—EFFECT OF HIS PAPER ON THE CORN-LAW QUESTION—CORRESPONDENCE WITH THACKERAY—APPOINTED SHERIFF OF ORKNEY—HIS MARRIAGE—PICTURE OF HOUSEHOLD CARES AND CALAMITIES—LECTURES ON BALLAD POETRY—THE "JUSTICE TO SCOTLAND" MOVEMENT—GREAT MEETING AT GLASGOW—LETTERS TO MR ROBERTSON—SCHEME OF A REFORM BILL—DEATH OF PROFESSOR WILSON.

THE Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the Edinburgh University having become vacant in 1845, by the removal of Professor Spalding to St Andrews, Aytoun, true to the ambition of his youth, applied for and obtained it. Many of his friends were surprised at what seemed like an abandonment of his prospects at the bar. But Aytoun knew himself best, and, as the event proved, he was wise in obeying the dictates of his genius rather than those of ordinary prudence. Writing in 1844 to his friend Monro, he had said: "Professionally I am getting on slowly, but, I hope, surely, and I write a great deal more than I ever did before, and in fact am getting a name. Perhaps for the bar's sake, one had better be without that; but

it is something—no, by heaven! it is *everything*—to work out the best reputation we may, and I am determined to be true to my destiny." It was this determination which decided him, at the peril of present loss, to apply for the Chair. In truth, in a mere money point of view, it presented few attractions. The salary was only £100 a-year. Attendance at the lectures was non-compulsory, and the average number of students for the first and several future years was so small that the annual income for fees did not exceed £130. But Aytoun loved the work, and he believed he could raise the Chair in popularity, and at the same time elevate the standard of literary attainment in the University, in a department in which his own experience while there had satisfied him it was greatly deficient. The result justified his anticipations. Year by year the number of his students increased, till from 30 in 1846 they became upwards of 150 in 1864. Moreover, the duties of the Chair did not necessarily interfere with his practice at the Bar, where he continued to compete for his share of what business was going among the young men. He was thus able to satisfy his own tastes, and at the same time to keep such a position in his profession as enabled him to claim in due time from his party the well-earned recognition of his services, which he received in his appointment as Sheriff of Orkney in 1852. Writing to myself on this subject in July 1858, he expresses himself thus:—

I had to make a return the other day about my class; and

very curious it was to go back upon the academical history of twelve years. When I got my Chair it was not worth £130 per annum; and it gives me a kind of shudder now to look back at the rash step of sacrificing professional practice for a driblet like that. But quem Deus vult *salvare*, prius dementat. It was the making of me. In itself a poor thing—for the average return for five years gives only about £300, the last not being included; but had I not taken the professorship, I should have been a concocter of Condescendences and drawer of Defences up to the present day, without probably the substantial benefit of being autocrat of all the Orkneys. Certainly I would not change my position just now for that of—— ——, who looks to me like a man whose ambition has been nipped in the bud. Would not you rather be a wild buffalo on the prairie, than a tame bull tethered in the very richest field of clover? Clover is an excellent thing, no doubt, but it must be the deuce and all to feel that you are absolutely forbidden to scamper.

The Chair of Rhetoric had been occupied by very distinguished men before Aytoun; but it has been well said that it was his peculiar merit to make it more practically useful than it had ever previously been. He soon found, to use his own words in 1858, "that in no department of letters are the students generally so deficient as in the knowledge of their own language and in practical composition." His main efforts were directed to correcting this deficiency, by introducing a system of exercises, which were carefully revised by himself, and sometimes even entirely re-written. Inglorious as this work was, and irksome as he found it when the numbers of his class increased, he considered it a duty imposed upon him by his situation. Fine abilities and varied knowledge were often, as he saw, practically lost, because their owner knew neither how

to write nor how to speak with effect. These were defects which practice under intelligent guidance could alone cure, and this he spared no pains to give. He was not content merely to engage the interest of his students in literary studies, but set himself to make them masters of that practical skill in composition and delivery which, while they are a gain in all spheres of life, were especially important to that large section of his students who were destined for the Bar or the Church. His lectures, in extent of information, in critical sagacity, or in force of style, may not have surpassed those of his predecessors; but there was in the man himself something especially fitted to secure the attention and quicken the sympathy of young men. He knew and sympathised with their tastes and aspirations. His mind was of the kind that kindles by contact with its fellows, and he let out his heart in speaking to his students, in his eagerness to imbue them with the love of letters, which was his own exceeding great delight, and with his love of his native country, which was his passion. He was playful, kindly, genial, with no trace of pedantry about him; by anecdote and illustration he connected their studies with the events and interests of the day; and these qualities gave his lectures a stimulating charm, of infinitely greater value for the purpose for which they were designed than their mere literary excellence, considerable as that undoubtedly was.

"His manner and bearing to the students," writes one who attended his last course of lectures, "were

eminently such as deeply attached to him their affections and secured their respect. Ever courteous, suave, and easy of access, there was a certain calm and natural dignity in his manner, that prevented the least approach of familiarity, which students are too apt to assume on receiving encouragement, and which effectually quelled the turbulent spirits that were always to be expected in the very large class his great reputation always secured for him; while his excessively keen and delightful sense of humour, his great fund of pleasant anecdotes, and his elegant and lively scholarship, lent an unequalled charm and interest to themes which no one was more capable of adorning and rendering eminently suggestive."

Before he was appointed Professor, Aytoun had become a steady contributor to 'Blackwood's Magazine.' The cordial recognition of his abilities by its proprietors may, indeed, be said to have determined Aytoun's literary career. The late Mr Alexander and Mr Robert Blackwood, who were then its editors, had known him from boyhood, and were, therefore, no strangers to the brilliant powers which made Aytoun conspicuous among his friends. They had watched his early literary efforts with interest, and when they invited him to write for the Magazine, the request, from men of their proved sagacity and large literary experience, conveyed an assurance to the young author that there was that in him by which he might hope to win not only distinction, but a competent income, independently of his profession. The connection thus begun

continued unbroken to the last. It was not that of author and publisher merely, but of friend and friend. Aytoun was proud of being a writer for Maga; but, far more than any feeling of this sort, his personal regard for the Blackwoods attached him to their literary staff. Whatever attraction the wider field which London offers to literary ambition might otherwise have had for him, disappeared after his agreeable relations towards them were established. He delighted in working for them, and they on the other hand treated him with entire confidence. The result was equally satisfactory on both sides. He gave the Blackwoods his very best work, and in doing so he made for himself a more prominent and influential reputation than without their assistance he could have hoped to obtain.

For many years after 1844 he continued to write for the Magazine almost monthly. It is impossible to review the great mass of articles which he produced, on literature, art, and politics, without admiration of the varied powers and the unwearied industry which they display. "He had a wonderful power of work," writes Mr John Blackwood, "and a regular methodical power, too. I could always rely upon him if he promised to do anything, and I never pressed him. He used to say that I pushed this latter feeling too far, but I would have felt it like spurring a willing horse; and I am sure I was right, although he said it sometimes made him feel as if I was indifferent about a paper. To work with him was really pleasure." He was eminently conscientious, sparing no labour in research, however

dry the details, in order that he might be sure of his facts, more especially in dealing with all social and political questions. In discussing these he kept a tight rein upon his imagination, and showed a native shrewdness and practical sagacity, which, as in the case of Sir Walter Scott, were no less conspicuous features of his mind. He fought the battle of the Conservative party in the Magazine temperately, but with unflinching vigour. No papers commanded more attention, in the great struggle which preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws, than those which he wrote on "British Agriculture and Foreign Competition" in 'Blackwood' for February and March 1850. They were based on returns collected with the greatest care from the great leading farmers in the kingdom, and stated the case of the agriculturists with singular power and ability. Some of the most competent judges, including the late Mr M'Culloch, who had no leanings in favour of Protection, considered them to be unanswered and unanswerable. "If the cause there advocated was to have been won," it has been truly said, "those articles would have contributed largely to the victory." Aytoun went into this question with all the earnestness of strong conviction, conquering even his dislike to public display so far as to speak upon it as the representative of the Scottish agriculturists, at the great Protection meeting held in London in May 1850. The great discoveries of gold, and other unforeseen circumstances, neutralised in a great degree the disastrous results which were anticipated from the changes against

which he had fought so strongly; but to the last his convictions remained unaltered as to the hazards of the policy which prevailed.

At a time when Thackeray's great powers were comparatively unrecognised, Aytoun had in more than one of his papers spoken of them with warm admiration. This kind of service was likely to be deeply felt by Thackeray, who had for many years been doing a great deal of first-class work, without earning either fortune or fame. He was therefore predisposed to like Aytoun, and, when they met in London, they took most cordially to each other. It could scarcely be otherwise with two men who, apart from their intellectual gifts, were both so thoroughly genial, kindly, and natural. Their correspondence was of the frankest and most friendly kind. Some of Thackeray's letters have fortunately been preserved, and will be read with interest, especially by those who will recognise the friend they loved in the tenor of every phrase of such letters as the following.

13 Young Street, Kensington,
Jan. 2, 1847.

My dear Aytoun,—I hope The Maclosky received the Mulligan present. I ought to have written before, answering your kind, hearty letter, but business, you know, and weariness of quill-driving after business hours, &c. I don't write to anybody, that's the fact, unless I want something of them, and perhaps that's the case at this present.

I think I have never had any ambition hitherto, or cared what the world thought my work, good or bad; but now the truth forces itself upon me, if the world will once take to admiring Titmarsh, all his guineas will be multiplied by 10. Guineas are

good. I have got children, only 10 years more to the fore, say, &c.; now is the time, my lad, to make your A when the sun at length has begun to shine.

Well, I think if I can make a push at the present minute—if my friends will shout, Titmarsh for ever!—hurrah for, &c., &c., I may go up with a run to a pretty fair place in my trade, and be allowed to appear before the public as among the first fiddles. But my tunes must be heard in the streets, and organs must grind them. Ha! Now do you read me?

Why don't 'Blackwood' give me an article? Because he refused the best story I ever wrote?* Colburn refused the present "Novel without a Hero," and if any man at Blackwood's or Colburn's, and if any man since—fiddle-de-dee. Upon my word and honour, I never said so much about myself before: but I know this, if I had the command of 'Blackwood,' and a humoristical person like Titmarsh should come up and labour hard and honestly (please God) for 10 years, I would give him a hand. Now try, like a man, revolving these things in your soul, and see if you can't help me. . . . And if I can but save a little money, by the Lord! I'll try and keep it.

Some day when less selfish I will write to you about other matters than the present ego. The dining season has begun in London already, I am sorry to say, and the Christmas feeding is frightfully severe. . . . I have my children with me, and am mighty happy in that paternal character—preside over legs of mutton comfortably—go to church at early morning and like it—pay rates and taxes, &c., &c. Between this line and the above, a man has brought me the 'Times' on "The Battle of Life" to read. Appy Dickens! But I love Pickwick and Crummles too well to abuse this great man. Aliquando bonus. And you, young man, coming up in the world full of fight, take counsel from a venerable and peaceable old gladiator who has stripped for many battles.† Gad, sir, this caution is a very good sign.

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* "The Great Hoggarty Diamond."

† Thackeray always maintained the supremacy of Dickens over all contemporary humorists, and that in no stinted terms. "Think of all we owe Mr Dickens since those half-dozen years," it was thus he

Do you remember how complimentary Scott and Goethe were? I like the patriarchal air of some people. Have you ever any snow in Scotland?

(*Here follows an admirable drawing of a dustman singing beside his cart, with snow deep in the street.*)

As I was walking in just now I met this fellow singing "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls" driving a dust-cart. I burst out laughing, and so did he. He is as good as Leech's boy in the last 'Punch.' How good Leech is, and what a genuine humour! And Hans Christian Andersen, have you read him? I am wild about him, having only just discovered that delightful delicate fanciful creature. Good-bye, my dear Aytoun. I wish you a merry Christmas, and to honest Johnny Blackwood. Thank him for the Magazine. I shall enjoy it in bed to-morrow morning, when I've left orders *not* to be called for church.—Yours ever,

W. M. T.

Thackeray seems to have been under the mistaken impression, which afterwards became very general, that

wrote of him in reviewing the "Christmas Carol" in 'Fraser's Magazine,' in February 1844, "the store of happy hours he has made us pass, the kindly and pleasant companions he has introduced to us; the harmless laughter, the generous, the frank, manly, human love which he has taught us to feel. Every month of these years has brought us some kind token from this delightful genius. . . . His books have made millions of rich and poor happy; they might have been locked up for nine years, doubtless, and pruned here and there, and improved (which I doubt), but where would have been the reader's benefit all this time, while the author was elaborating his performance? . . . The last two people I heard speak of this book were women; neither knows the other or the author, but both said by way of criticism, 'God bless him!' . . . What a feeling is this for a writer to be able to inspire, and what a reward to reap!" There is much more to the same effect, not less charming, nor less honourable to the creator of "Tiny Tim," and his generous rival in the field of fiction. It is a wrong to Thackeray's fame, that the best of his fugitive papers, including that just quoted from, are not reprinted.

Aytoun was the editor of 'Blackwood.' Whether he thought so or not, it was very natural he should suggest to Aytoun that a timely word of commendation in the Magazine would be much to his advantage. Had it been given, which it was not, it would have been given with all sincerity, as Thackeray himself would have given it to a well-deserving friend in a like case. But the suggestion was withdrawn in the following letter almost as soon as made, and in a manner eminently characteristic. Thackeray was too honest, too straightforward; he had too strong a sense of what is due to the public in matters of criticism, even to seem to claim from friendship one jot of consideration which was not his by right, or of panegyric, which, to be of any value, "must come unsought for, if it come at all."

13 Young Street, Kensington, Monday Night,
Jan. 13, 1847.

My dear Aytoun,—The copy of Mrs Perkins which was sent by the Mulligan to the other chieftain has met with a mishap. It travelled to Edinburgh in the portmanteau of a friend of mine, who arrived at ten o'clock at night and started for Inverness the next morning at six. Mrs P. went with him. He forgot her at Inverness, and came back to London, whither Mrs Perkins was sent after him at a cost of 4s. 10d. for carriage. She is not worth that money either for you or me to pay, and waits in my room till you come to town in spring.

I have been thinking of the other matter on which I unbusmd myself to you, and withdraw my former letter. Puffs are good, and the testimony of good men; but I don't think these will make a success for a man, and he ought to stand as the public chooses to put him. I will try, please God, to do my best, and the money will come perhaps some day! Meanwhile a man so

lucky as myself has no reason to complain. So let all puffing alone, though, as you know, I am glad if I can have and deserve your private good opinion. The women like 'Vanity Fair,' I find, very much, and the publishers are quite in good spirits regarding that venture.

This is all I have to say—in the solitude of midnight—with a quiet cigar and the weakest gin-and-water in the world, ruminating over a child's ball, from which I have just come, having gone as chaperon to my little girls. One of them had her hair plaited in two tails, the other had ringlets, (*here follows a sketch of the children*) and the most fascinating bows of blue ribbon. It was very merry and likewise sentimental. We went in a fly quite genteel, and, law! what a comfort it was when it was over!

Adyou.—Yours sincerely,

W. M. THACKERAY.

When Lord Derby came into office in 1852, a vacancy in the sheriffship of Orkney and Zetland enabled him to requite the eminent services of Aytoun to his party by appointing him to the office.* He applied himself to its duties with his habitual earnestness and assiduity, and performed them, down to his death, to the general satisfaction of the Orcadians. He usually passed a portion of the summer months in the islands which composed his sheriffdom, endearing himself to many of the hospitable dwellers in that remote region by his kindly and genial qualities, and respected for the justice and sagacity of the judgments which he dispensed as their lawman.

The following letter to his friend, Mr John Blackwood, was written soon after his first arrival as sheriff

* In June 1853 Aytoun received from Oxford the honorary degree of D.C.L.

on the scene of his boyish ramble with his friend Monro. The allusion in the beginning of the letter is to a poem he was writing on "The Age of Gold," which appeared in 'Blackwood' for October 1852.

LERWICK, *August* 16, 1852.

MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,—It is no go for next month in so far as I am concerned. I clapped the spurs into Pegasus, but the foundered beast stopped after an uneasy canter of 200 yards, and I have since been galloping on Zetland ponies. Sans metaphor, I could not compass more than 200 lines, as I have really a deal to do here, and a deal to see, so that I must cry off until I have a little more leisure. . . . This is a strange country, but, on the whole, I like it much. It is the most primitive part of her Majesty's dominions, and, but for the language, has no affinity whatever with Scotland. I have seen Sumburgh Head and Fitful Head, and slept at Triptolemus Yellowley's, and eaten dulse instead of anchovy toast, and swilled water for lack of brandy, and performed divers other feats too marvellous and fishlike to be here recounted. I am gradually becoming web-footed, walk uneasily on my hinder fins, and when I cough the sound is as the cry of a cormorant. I have a wild craving for sillocks, and of an evening we play at nothing but hot cockles. Good-bye; I am just going to the beach to gather limpets.—Yours always, W. E. A.

Aytoun formed a warm attachment for his sheriff-depute, Mr James Robertson; and his frequent business communications with that gentleman were generally enlivened by gossip about his own affairs, or public or local politics, written as frankly as he would have spoken had they been side by side. These letters have been kindly placed by Mr Robertson at my disposal; and as they throw a pleasing light upon the friendli-

ness and playfulness of his character, I shall not hesitate to present some extracts from them.

In April 1849 Aytoun had married Jane Emily, the youngest daughter of Professor Wilson, and removed from 11 Fettes Row, where he had resided with his mother and sisters since his father's death in 1843, to Inverleith Terrace, in a northern suburb of Edinburgh. Here they resided until the domestic disasters recounted in the following letter led to his removal to the house which he occupied for the remainder of his life:—

EDINBURGH, 1 INVERLEITH TERRACE,
February 7, 1853.

MY DEAR ROBERTSON,—I have just received intimation of the death of the late Lord President Boyle. He was a fine worthy of the old Scottish breed, and an honour to our courts and country. There is nothing new here politically, but if there had been, I do not think I should have attended greatly to it, having been taken up with domestic matters. The house we occupy at present is a small one, and very ill finished. This winter the rains have been so violent that they absolutely penetrated the outer wall (ours is a corner house), and the upper story is uninhabitable. There was a certain white silk dress, which recalls indistinct reminiscences of the altar, hanging peacefully on a peg. Blight and mildew! It was spotted like a leopard's skin. So, for that and other reasons, the situation being dreadfully far both from the Parliament House and the College, we determined to move up hill, and seek another Eden. And the upshot is, that last week I purchased a house in Great Stuart Street big enough to lodge a patriarch. I am not frightened at what I have done; I am simply stupified. There will be the plumber, and the gas-fitter, and the painters; hum of upholstery work, and the slave that vendeth carpets, with all manner of minor harpies, upon me at once. They will snap up the whole of my corn, and batten upon the fruits of my intellectual labour for

years. I have just been walking about the house, after the manner of Solomon Eagle, with a brazier upon my head, exclaiming, "Woe! woe!" to the infinite terror of the housemaid.

And now, farewell! In the words of the dying outlaw, 'Feed thou on the deer of the forest, and when these fail thee, prey on the herds of the Saxon, and the Gael that are Saxon in their souls.'—Yours distractedly.

Soon afterwards, Aytoun, following the example of Thackeray and others, commenced a series of lectures on ballad poetry. Often as he had faced an audience as a public speaker, the appearance in a new character seems, to judge by the following note, to have filled him with something akin to that uncontrollable deliquescence of courage known as "stage fright:"—

April 7, 1853.

My dear Robertson,—I am in a state of mental misery, as I have to deliver my first public lecture to-night.

. . . . . .

Oh Lord! oh Lord, sir! I shall break down—I'm sure I shall. You may look for the multure case next week. "Ladies and gentlemen." "Fling him ower! Fiddlers!"* Oh my dear Robertson, never you try lecturings!

The lectures proved so successful in Edinburgh, that Aytoun was induced to repeat them in London. His reputation attracted large audiences, but they produced no great impression there. They did not seem to me to hit the tone of an English audience of the highest class, which his audience was, being somewhat too diffuse in style, and not allowing sufficiently for his hearers' previous knowledge of the subject. His

* The cry of the Scottish theatrical gods when their gallery is in uproar.

strongly-marked Scottish accent too,—pleasant at all times to native ears—somewhat marred the effect of his impassioned delivery of the ballads, with which his lectures were liberally illustrated.

The following very characteristic letter has reference to a movement which was started in the autumn of 1853, for the redress of certain Scottish grievances, in which Lord Eglinton, Aytoun, and others took a prominent part. The chief objects of complaint were the want of a Secretary of State for Scotland, a functionary supposed to be represented, but in point of fact represented most imperfectly, by the Lord Advocate, the insufficient number of representatives in Parliament, the removal from Scotland of the various offices and boards sanctioned by the Treaty of Union, the neglect of the royal parks and palaces, and generally the indifference of the Imperial Government in all matters specially affecting the interests of Scotland.

November 3, 1853.

My dear Robertson,—Mrs Aytoun tells me that she has just written you a patriotic letter, so, although the fit is strong upon me, I shall spare you details, and refer you to the report of proceedings in the 'Mercury.' You never saw anything like the enthusiasm which prevails here on the subject. The birses of Mr Ruddy Lion are fairly up, and his mouth is stretched wide enough to entomb a hecatomb of Cockneys. This is the beginning, but the ultimate success of the movement will depend on the support we receive from the country. If the example of the Orcadians is to be followed, we may keep our breath to cool our porridge, and really such plucklessness and apathy is disgraceful. Zooks, man! are there not a dozen fellows in the islands with soul enough to form themselves into a local association, and come

down with five shillings a-piece for the honour of their country and the assertion of their own rights? What the devil are S—— and B—— about? Can't they join us as the corporation of Kirkwall? Believe me, Crail despises you for your hen-heartedness, and Pittenweem returns thanks that she is not as the degenerate Norsemen are! Mark me, if there is no speedy symptom of spunk, I shall conspire with the D——s to have the Scat* augmented, and the lispund† shall be a burden to your backs. I say no more. I am ashamed of you. Vikings indeed! Why, you have not, so far as I can see, the collective pluck of a sillock.‡ Go to, ye scatlings, ye chuffs, ye sham Berserkars! And when you get up, as usual, at three o'clock of the afternoon, and light the gas for morning prayers, don't flatter yourselves that you are much above the level of the Esquimaux. So no more at present from your incensed

W. EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN.

All this amusing indignation was apparently thrown away. The Orcadians had bestirred themselves, and sent in their adhesion to the movement before Aytoun's letter was despatched, and in his next letter he makes amends as follows:—

December 17, 1853.

MY DEAR ROBERTSON,—On the receipt of yours, with the gratifying intelligence that the commissioners of supply of Orkney had joined us, I communicated it to Mr Carter, the secretary of the association. . . . The Orkney resolutions, I assure you, have been of immense importance; because the remoter the district the more powerful is the testimony as to the general neglect, and it shows over how wide a surface the complaint extends.

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* A tax levied upon all land in Orkney held by Odal-red, for the support of the Crown.

† A weight in use in Orkney, now equal to 18 lb. Scots measure.

‡ The year-old fry of the coal-fish, a dainty much esteemed in Orkney.

We had a tremendous meeting at Glasgow on the 15th. The immense City Hall was crowded from door to ceiling,—I believe not short of 5000 people, the very best men of Glasgow, and all most enthusiastic. I spoke, as you will see, on the subject of the Secretary of State. I had intended to give, as an illustration of gross neglect, the history of the Orkney grievances; but, on consideration, I became aware that if I did so I might lay myself open to animadversion; for there are many people ready to snap at anything which they could make a handle of for personal attack, and therefore I forbore. The meeting went off triumphantly, but, as far as some of us were concerned, the natural feeling of exultation was cruelly depressed. The Countess of Eglinton had been for some time very ill—labouring, indeed, under a mortal complaint—and nothing but a strong sense of duty brought the Earl from home to attend the meeting. I went out with him to Possil House (Sir A. Alison's) that night, having arranged to leave early next morning, but in the course of the night a despatch arrived summoning him home, and I hear this morning that the countess is no more. I can't tell you how deeply I am impressed with this awful calamity. If ever woman was guardian angel to a man, directing his impulses and cheering him in a high and honourable career, Lady Eglinton was that to the Earl. A more devoted couple never lived, and the blow must be an awful one to him.

I have a great class this winter, which adds to my other discomforts, for the youths have caught the spirit of the time,—are all Young Scotlanders, eager to write and make speeches, and are frantic for reputation. I have as much MS. in the shape of exercises as would roast an ox, to correct next week.

January 5, 1854.

Be it known to you, dearly beloved, that your missives have come duly to hand. The petition to her Majesty will be sent immediately to the proper quarter, and the memorial on the wrongs of Orkney is in the hands of the printer. It is really a model of a memorial—clear, condensed, and stripped of technicality, and must, I think, carry conviction, if it is only carefully read, which I doubt not will be the case now. There can be

little doubt that the question of Scottish rights, or rather wrongs, will ere long be mooted in both Houses of Parliament. I have this morning a letter from Lord Eglinton, who, in the midst of his heavy bereavement, has not forgotten the common cause, and I consider it more than probable that he will take up the matter in the Peers. When that time comes the case of Orkney will not be forgotten. I have letters from India and the colonies, written before the accounts of the public meeting at Edinburgh had reached them, but founded on the article in 'Blackwood' for September, which shows that the Scottish feeling is at least as keen abroad as at home. I cannot but think that some substantial benefit will be the result of this movement.

Some substantial benefit did result from the movement, but only indirectly. It attracted to it certain unruly spirits, the extravagance of whose views disgusted Aytoun and those with whom it had originated. They determined, therefore, on breaking up their association, content with having called the attention of the Government to a few substantial grievances, which were put in the way of being removed, and letting it be very clearly seen that the feelings and interests of the northern part of the island were not with impunity to be systematically overlooked, as they had for some time been.

The following letter contains a scheme for a Reform Bill, which has, in most of its main features, been since brought forward with considerable approval. It shows how closely Aytoun had studied a question which his political adversaries were apt to think was understood only by themselves:—

February 27, 1854.

My dear Robertson,—I can tell you nothing about the new Reform Bill, except that it is in no favour with the

Whigs, who, being in, see no reason for disturbing present arrangements. For all that, it is possible it may be pushed. The object evidently is to swamp the counties by pitching into them the inhabitants of small towns, and this must be resisted. I have written a short article upon it for 'Blackwood,' and shall again return to the charge more elaborately; for I think a great and beneficial alteration might be made, though in a direction never yet indicated. My views are these: first, fix the whole numbers of the House of Commons—say, as at present, 654. Then make a just allotment to England, Scotland, and Ireland respectively, according to the double test of population and revenue, so that each of the three kingdoms shall be equally represented in respect of these two criteria. Let there be a distinct borough and distinct county qualification; but, with regard to the small boroughs, let the principle be, not disfranchisement, but union. If Calne, for example, be too small to return a member, join it with the nearest borough in the same position; and where that is impossible, add to it as many small towns in the neighbourhood as will make up a respectable constituency. In this way you gain three points: first, you diminish by union the number of English boroughs, so as to admit of the national redistribution, which ought to be the fundamental point; secondly, you still preserve the balance between town and country; and, thirdly, you relieve the counties of a vast number of swamping votes at present thrown into them from unrepresented towns. But my great point is this, that no man shall vote for more than one member in one place. Why should I, living in Edinburgh, have two representatives, and my friend, who lives in Leith, only one? It is plain that, as an individual, I have double his political influence, though our qualification is the same. But Edinburgh requires to have two members on account of its importance. Granted. But why should the same men return both members? The proper method is to divide the city into wards. Let one division elect one member and the other the other; and in this way property will have its weight, and we shall have no more of tyrant majorities. The system is pursued at present to a certain extent in the English counties which are divided, and the voters poll in each without reference to the other. Why not carry this

further in the counties, and apply it also to the towns? I should like to hear what you, who are a practical bird, think of this view.

Soon after the date of this letter, Aytoun's father-in-law, Christopher North, died. He had for some time been in feeble health, and but the shadow of his former self. The loss, when it came, was not the less severe to Aytoun, who had from his boyhood known and admired and loved him, and to Mrs Aytoun, to whom the great Professor was tenderly attached.

Aytoun announced the event to me in the following letter:—

EDINBURGH, *April* 4, 1854.

MY DEAR MARTIN,—Many thanks for your Correggio. . . . . It reached me on a day of calamity,—that which struck my father-in-law down. I have witnessed the passing away of a great and gifted spirit,—which, though oppressed at the last by physical affliction, and flickering in the socket like the last leaps of an expiring candle, was a spectacle never to be forgotten. He died painlessly. Early on Friday the 31st March he had another stroke of paralysis, and never afterwards recovered consciousness. We watched him for three days, life surging all the while within his gigantic frame, until on Monday night, just as the clock struck twelve, the heaving ceased, the breath became feebler, and with one soft, unagonised sigh, he gave up the ghost. I went to-day into the room where the body is lying. The hand of affection, from one who hardly knew him, had placed a bouquet of white camelias on his breast; and though my heart was very full, I could not shed a tear in the presence of that nobleness of death.

I have written this hasty note in the midst of some pressing duties. I know how you and your dear wife regarded him, and I thought you might like to hear from me on the occasion. Adieu!

CHAPTER VI.

HIS INDUSTRY AND VERSATILITY—PUBLICATION OF 'FIRMILIAN'—ITS RECEPTION AND EFFECTS—ACCOUNT OF IT—HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO 'BLACKWOOD'—COMMENCEMENT OF 'BOTHWELL'—HIS ANSWER TO CRITICISMS ON IT—DIFFICULTIES OF THE TASK—ITS PUBLICATION, AND RECEPTION BY THE PUBLIC—LORD LYTTON'S OPINION OF IT—GROUSE-SHOOTING IN ORKNEY.

As indicative of Aytoun's industry and versatility, it may be remarked, that no fewer than five papers by him, all of an elaborate kind, two literary and three political, appeared in 'Blackwood' for March and April 1854; while for two years previous, every number of the Magazine, with two exceptions, contained at least one, and sometimes two or three, papers by him. He had not, however, amidst his labours as a reviewer and publicist, forgotten his poet-craft; and in 'Blackwood' for May appeared fragments of what is perhaps the finest piece of humorous verse which he had hitherto produced—'Firmilian; or, The Student of Badajoz.' They were set in what seemed a grave review of an unpublished tragedy, and so skilfully handled that most of the newspaper critics took the part of the poet against the reviewer, never suspecting the identity of both, and maintained the poetry to be

fine poetry and the critic to be a dunce. As the following letter shows, this induced Aytoun to gratify these ingenious gentlemen by giving them a complete specimen of a "spasmodic tragedy:"—

EDINBURGH, *May* 27, 1854.

MY DEAR MARTIN,—I heard of you the other day from our friend Edward Forbes, who has now taken his place among us. I was at his introductory lecture, which went off very well, and I think he will be sure to make himself popular with the students. . . .

Did you see the sham notice of "Firmilian" in Blackwood for May? Strange to say, the newspapers (with but four or five exceptions) have treated it as an actual production, and some of them declare that the review is grossly unfair, and entreat Percy Jones to give his volume to the public! Between you and me, I intend, for the sake of mystification, to gratify them, and have already done a good bit, so that you may expect one of these days to see a real roaring tragedy. I intend to introduce a good many hits by way of spice. It is very curious, when you sit down to write this kind of thing, to find how very closely some of the passages approximate to good poetry; and I am really of opinion that the best things in Marlowe were owing mainly to a fine rhythmical ear and a reckless energy. I wish I could show you some of my lines, written *currente calamo*, for this sort of crambo comes out as fluently as prose. Here is a short sample—

I clove my way
Right eastward, till I lighted at the foot
Of holy Helicon, and drank my fill
At the clear spout of Aganippe's stream.
I've rolled my limbs in ecstasy along
The self-same turf on which old Homer lay
That night he dreamed of Helen and of Troy;
And I have heard at midnight the sweet strains
Come quiring from the hill-top, where, enshrined
In the rich foldings of a silver cloud,
The Muses sang Apollo into sleep.

Damme, sir, if crambo isn't the thing after all! And the advantage is, that you can go on slapdash, without thinking!

Don't say anything about this at present. I want to mystify the London humorists.

When the completed tragedy appeared a few months afterwards, the hoax was not less successful than before, and the poem was dealt with by several critics as a serious production of the spasmodic school. Others who felt the satire, but could not appreciate the humour, abused it as an unfair attack upon the leading writers of that school. The admirers of 'Festus,' 'Balder,' and the other works at which the satire was aimed, were sorely puzzled what to make of it. The sense of humour not being a quality in which they abounded, they were unable to form even a surmise of the delicate sarcasm which runs through the story and the style of 'Firmilian.' At the same time, however, the dash of the imagery, and the brilliancy and vigour of the versification, made them feel the presence of a poetic power which was not to be gainsaid, and left them with an unpleasant consciousness that the satirist was quite a match for their favourite bards even where they were strongest.

Aytoun's poem was worthy of a much wider popularity than the poems it was meant to ridicule. But the public, who had not read these, could not be expected thoroughly to relish 'Firmilian,' and it therefore never became so widely appreciated as it deserved. Only those who know to what lengths of impiety and pruriency in conception, and of extravagance in ex-

pression, the poets of the spasmodic school had gone in some of their then recent works, can understand how pungent and how well timed was the ridicule with which Aytoun overwhelmed them. No criticism however searching, no invective however trenchant, could have served the purpose half so well of showing, in the language of Edmund Spenser's friend, Gabriel Harvey, that true poetry "is not mad-brained, or ridiculous, or absurd, or blasphemous, or monstrous, but deep-conceited, but pleasurable, but delicate, but exquisite, but gracious, but admirable." Aytoun was quite alive—no man more so—to the unquestionable power which some of these writers displayed; and for the youngest writer of the school, Mr Alexander Smith, he entertained a very genuine admiration, which, on their becoming acquainted, as they afterwards did, was mingled with warm personal regard. But the offences against propriety and good taste of which they were guilty, and the absurd adulation with which the very vices of their style were hailed by their admirers, thoroughly justified Aytoun in dealing with them as he did. His masterly parody had this excellent result, that the field of literature has since then been all but free from these "weeds of glorious feature" with which Bailey, Dobell, and their followers, might otherwise have overrun it. Mr Alexander Smith, whose 'Drama of Life' came in for some of the keenest shafts of Aytoun's ridicule, had the good sense to profit by the sharp lesson it read him. Foregoing in his future works the cheap splendours of a reckless imagination for healthful feeling

and natural expression, he did justice to a genius whose real power had just begun to make itself felt when it was lost to us by his premature death.

As 'Firmilian,' despite its great merits, is one of the least known of Aytoun's works, it may not be out of place to give an outline of it here.

The drama opens in the hero's study—all spasmodic dramas do. Firmilian has set himself a great task, the composition of 'Cain; a Tragedy.' But his imagination being of that kind which only works under the stimulus of strong realities, he feels himself unable to paint the first fratricide's pangs until a preliminary murder has given him a notion of remorse.* Accordingly he starts on a career of crime with the purest poetical motives. His meditations open thus:—

> Three hours of study—and what gain thereby?
> My brain is reeling to attach the sense
> Of what I read, as a drunk mariner
> Who, stumbling o'er the bulwark, makes a clutch
> At the wild incongruity of ropes,
> And topples into mud!

Tossing aside Aristotle, whom he has been reading, with strong expressions of contempt for him, and the other "hoary dotards of antiquity," he reviews in succession the respective attractions of law, theology, and medicine; and the practical element which lies at the base of his imaginative nature is revealed in certain forcible comments on the mercenary character of those

* Firmilian's prototype here was the "Balder" of Mr Dobell.

who make a profession of the three great divisions of learning,—

> The Lawyer speaks no word without a fee—
> The Priest demands his tithes, and will not sing
> A gratis mass to help his brother's soul.
> The purgatorial key is made of gold:
> None else will fit the wards;—and for the Doctor,
> The good kind man who lingers by your couch,
> Compounds you pills and potions, feels your pulse,
> And takes especial notice of your tongue;
> If you allow him once to leave the room
> Without a proper greasing of his palm,
> Look out for Azrael!

This systematic and somewhat prosaic utilising of the learning of the schools is of course quite beneath a genius like Firmilian's. With a fine frenzy and force of diction, in which we are often reminded of "Marlowe's mighty line," he thus proclaims his mission,—

> And shall I then take Celsus for my guide,
> Confound my brain with dull Justinian's tomes,
> Or stir the dust that lies o'er Augustine?
> Not I, in faith! I've leaped into the air,
> And clove my way through ether, like a bird
> That flits beneath the glimpses of the moon,
> Right eastward, till I lighted at the foot
> Of holy Helicon, and drank my fill
> At the clear spout of Aganippe's stream;
> I've rolled my limbs in ecstasy along
> The self-same turf on which old Homer lay
> That night he dreamed of Helen and of Troy:
> And I have heard, at midnight, the sweet strains
> Come quiring from the hill-top, where, enshrined
> In the rich foldings of a silver cloud,
> The Muses sang Apollo into sleep.

Then came the voice of universal Pan,
The dread earth-whisper, booming in mine ear—
"Rise up, Firmilian—rise in might!" it said;
"Great youth, baptised to song! be it thy task,
Out of the jarring discords of the world,
To recreate stupendous harmonies
More grand in diapason than the roll
Among the mountains of the thunder-psalm!
Be thou no slave of passion. Let not love,
Pity, remorse, nor any other thrill
That sways the actions of ungifted men,
Affect thy course. Live for thyself alone.
Let appetite thy ready handmaid be,
And pluck all fruitage from the tree of life,
Be it forbidden or no. If any comes
Between thee and the purpose of thy bent,
Launch thou the arrow from the string of might
Right to the bosom of the impious wretch,
And let it quiver there! Be great in guilt!
If, like Busiris, thou canst rack the heart,
Spare it no pang. So shalt thou be prepared
To make thy song a tempest, and to shake
The earth to its foundation—Go thy way!"
I woke, and found myself in Badajoz.
But from that day, with frantic might, I've striven
To give due utterance to the awful shrieks
Of him who first imbued his hand in gore,—
To paint the mental spasms that tortured Cain!
How have I done it? Feebly. What we write
Must be the reflex of the thing we know;
For who can limn the morning, if his eyes
Have never looked upon Aurora's face?
Or who describe the cadence of the sea,
Whose ears were never open to the waves,
Or the shrill winding of the Triton's horn?
What do I know as yet of homicide?
Nothing. Fool—fool! to lose thy precious time
In dreaming of what may be, when an act,

Easy to plan, and easier to effect,
Can teach thee everything! What! craven mind,
Shrink'st thou from doing, for a noble aim,
What, every hour, some villain, wretch, or slave
Dares for a purse of gold? It is resolved—
I'll ope the lattice of some mortal cage,
And let the soul go free.

A draught of wine lends additional vigour to this resolution:—

But the victim? That
Requires a pause of thought. I must begin
With some one dear to me, or else the deed
Would lose its flavour and its poignancy.

His first thought is of "the tender, blushing, yielding Lilian:"—

What if I saved
Her young existence from all future throes,
And laid her pallid on an early bier?
Why, that were mercy both to her and me,
Not ruthless sacrifice. And, more than this,
She hath an uncle, an inquisitor,
Who might be tempted to make curious quest
About the final ailments of his niece.
Therefore, dear Lilian, live! I harm thee not.

This mixture of tenderness with discretion is exquisite. Mariana, "the blooming mistress of the moated grange," next occurs to him; but he puts her aside with the reflection that they are not married:—

It will be time enough to think of her,
After her lands are mine; therefore, my own,
My sweet affianced, sleep thou on in peace.

Indiana, "that full-blown beauty of Abassin blood, whose orient charms are madness," then crosses his

fancy, but she is too recent an accession to his erotic triumphs to be parted with just at present. But then

> There's Haverillo, mine especial friend,
> A better creature never framed a verse
> By dint of finger-scanning; yet he's deemed
> A proper poet by the gaping fools,
> Who know not me!

Just as we might imagine a "Balder" to speak of a Rogers. Nor does the analogy hold as to relative poetical merits only. Haverillo is rich and bounteous, and has lent liberally to the less thrifty bard, whose acknowledgments, not convertible in the market, slumber within his desk. An easy creditor withal,—

> He asks
> No instant payment for his fond advance,
> Nor yet is clamant for the usufruct.
> How if, he being dead, some sordid slave,
> Brother or cousin, heir to his great wealth,
> Should chance to stumble on those bonds of mine,
> And sue me for the debt? That were enough
> To break the wanton wings of Pegasus,
> And bind him to a stall!

Besides, the sponge is not yet thoroughly squeezed. "So let him live and thrive!" At this point Firmilian's meditations settle on three of his friends—Garcia Perez, "who ever stood above him in the schools;" Alphonzo d'Aguilar, whose Castilian *hauteur* has probably on some occasion wounded his too sensitive friend; and Alonzo Olivarez, who has the merit of being so near of kin to Mariana, Firmilian's affianced, that "his wealth accrues solely to her."

I love him like a brother.
Be these my choice. I sup with them to-morrow.

Having settled this point, the means of death are the next consideration, and the aid of Raymond Lully, that "quaint discourser upon pharmacy," is invoked in the same vein of ironical humour :—

Did not Lucretia,—not the frigid dame,
Who discomposed young Tarquin in her bower,
But the complete and liberal Borgia—
Consult thy pages for a sedative ?

The specific is found—tasteless, and not to be detected—and Firmilian's mind is free to expatiate in an apostrophe to the moon,—

That in its perfect and perennial course
Wanders at will across the fields of heaven.

Nothing is more strictly in consonance with the ethics of poets of the spasmodic school than the number and variety of Firmilian's amours. These gentlemen, who are generally in the last stages of dyspepsia —feeble vegetarians, scarcely insurable at any premium —are upon paper as amorous as satyrs. As the good Haverillo says—

Nine Muses waited on Apollo's beck—
Our modern poets are more amorous,
And far exceed the stint of Solomon :
But 'tis mere fancy ; inspiration all.

This may be so, but it is not wonderful that the Mariana of this poem should be somewhat uneasy as to the constancy of a gentleman of such comprehensive tastes as her betrothed. Accordingly, in the next scene,

we find her seeking some assurance from Haverillo to dispel her fears. Their colloquy is interrupted by the entrance of Firmilian to announce the death of his old uncle, the Dean of Salamanca, leaving to him all the worldly goods

> Of that quiescent pillar of the Church.

The inheritance, which of course is a mere fiction, comes most opportunely to the poet,

> For the last ducat slumbers in his purse,
> Without a coin to keep it company.

This dexterous hint opens the purse-strings of his friend, to whose offer of eighty ducats he yields with the reluctance and flow of fine sentiment characteristic of his tribe.

> I'd rather dash
> My hand, like Scævola, into the flame,
> Than vex my Haverillo! Oh dear heaven!
> If those who rail at human nature knew
> How many kindly deeds each hour brings forth—
> How man by man is cherished and sustained—
> They'd leave their carping. I will take your offer.

Haverillo, kindliest of simpletons, all admiration for his friend, presses him to explain the change from gaiety to gloom which has of late come over him, and makes him

> Look like one that wrestles with a thought,
> And cannot fling it down.

To his inquiries after the projected tragedy of "Cain," Firmilian replies that it is abandoned, as too gloomy for his handling, and that henceforward he means to take his place

With the large-hearted men who love their kind
(Whereof there seems a large abundance now),
And follow your example.

Haverillo, in delight, asks if he will hear a little thing, in the manner of Horace,

I wrote the other day on love and wine;

but Firmilian, who has no relish for the common-sense school, denies his generous ally this poor privilege of friendship, with a mixture of firmness and enthusiasm altogether enviable;

I would not listen to Apollo's lute
With greater rapture. But my time is brief.

Haverillo retires, and a dialogue ensues between Firmilian and Mariana, in which he succeeds in reassuring her, by the fluent falsehood and indignant assumption of injured innocence for which a gentleman of so strong a poetical temperament is never at a loss.

The next scene shows us Firmilian in hot controversy with his friends, Garcia Perez, D'Aguilar, and Olivarez, on the subject of female beauty, in which Firmilian's catholic admiration for the sex breaks forth with startling fervour. The episode in Alexander Smith's 'Drama of Life' is here satirised with great skill, and as a specimen of vigorous versification the passage is remarkable:—

I knew a poet once; and he was young,
And intermingled with such fierce desires
As made pale Eros veil his face with grief,
And caused his lustier brother to rejoice.
He was as amorous as a crocodile

In the spring season, when the Memphian bank,
Receiving substance from the glaring sun,
Resolves itself from mud into a shore.
And as the scaly creature wallowing there,
In its hot fits of passion, belches forth
The steam from out its nostrils, half in love,
And half in grim defiance of its kind,
Trusting that either, from the reedy fen,
Some reptile-virgin coyly may appear,
Or that the hoary Sultan of the Nile
May make tremendous challenge with his jaws,
And, like Mark Antony, assert his right
To all the Cleopatras of the ooze—
So fared it with the poet that I knew.

He had a soul beyond the vulgar reach,
Sun-ripened, swarthy. He was not the fool
To pluck the feeble lily from its shade,
When the black hyacinth stood in fragrance by.
The lady of his love was dusk as Ind,
Her lips as plenteous as the Sphinx's are,
And her short hair crisp with Numidian curl.
She was a negress. You have heard the strains
That Dante, Petrarch, and such puling fools
As loved the daughters of cold Japhet's race,
Have lavished idly on their icicles:
As snow meets snow, so their unhasty fall
Fell chill and barren on a pulseless heart.
But would you know what noontide ardour is,
Or in what mood the lion, in the waste,
All fever-maddened, and intent on cubs,
At the oasis waits the lioness—
That shall you gather from the fiery song,
Which that young poet framed, before he dared
Invade the vastness of his lady's lips.

Disgusted by Firmilian's sensuality, D'Aguilar strikes him, and a brawl ensues, which is only quieted

by an arrangement being made for a duel between them next morning. But the three friends are not destined to catch cold from the raw air of dawn. Firmilian has been the purveyor for their revel, and in some flasks of Ildefronso—a vintage new to the wine-trade—has proved the efficacy of Raymond Lully's anodyne mixture. Though his courage, therefore, is of Bob Acres's kind, he comes upon the ground next morning with none of that fire-eater's qualms. On the contrary, when we next see him, which is in the cathedral cloisters, his sole disquietude is to find that he is as much a stranger to remorse as before he drugged the goblets of his friends. But a sensation so valuable for poetic purposes is, he reflects, not perhaps to be so cheaply bought, and

> The subtle alchemist,
> Whose aim is the elixir, or that stone,
> The touch whereof makes baser metals gold,
> Must needs endure much failure, ere he finds
> The grand Arcanum. So is it with me.
> I have but shot one idle bolt away,
> And need not seek it further.

At this point his attention is arrested by a dialogue between a graduate, in whom the celebrated Oxford undergraduate is typified, and a priest, in which the former denounces the doctrines and the architecture of the Established Church with Ruskin-like vehemence, retiring with the prophecy,

> That o'er the stones wherein you place your pride,
> Annihilation waves her dusky wing.

The suggestion is not lost upon Firmilian, who indicates to the priest the probability of his young and enthusiastic friend realising his own prophecy. This is to screen himself from the suspicion of a majestic plan of destruction, which he forthwith puts into execution. As the graduate spoke, says Firmilian,

> Methought I saw the solid vaults give way,
> And the entire cathedral rise in air,
> As if it leaped from Pandemonium's jaws.

Accordingly he blows up the cathedral, with half the population of Badajoz at their devotions, by means of

> Some twenty barrels of the dusky grain,
> The secret of whose framing in an hour
> Of diabolic jollity and mirth
> Old Roger Bacon wormed from Beelzebub.

Still "Cain" does not advance. Remorse will not take hold upon Firmilian. On the contrary, he feels elated by the splendour of the spectacle presented by

> Pillars and altar, organ loft and screen,
> With a singed swarm of mortals intermixed,
> Whirling in anguish to the shuddering stars.

He feels he has been "too coarse and general in this business," and that in sending to the moon such a herd of

> Uninspired dullards, unpoetic slaves,
> The tag and rag and bobtail of mankind,

he has committed no heavier sin than if he

> Had thrust a stick of sulphur in the nest
> Of some poor droning hive of humble bees,
> And smoked them into silence.

All the qualities of a victim sufficiently select to give a chance of the much-coveted sensation of remorse, seem, however, to meet in his friend Haverillo, for whom, accordingly, we now find him waiting at the summit of the pillar of St Simeon Stylites—

> We have gazed
> Together on the midnight map of heaven,
> And marked the gems in Cassiopeia's hair—
> Together have we heard the nightingale
> Waste the exuberant music of her throat,
> And lull the flustering breezes into calm—
> Together have we emulously sung
> Of Hyacinthus, Daphne, and the rest,
> Whose mortal weeds Apollo changed to flowers.
> Also from him have I derived much aid
> In golden ducats, which I fain would pay
> Back with extremest usury, were but
> Mine own convenience equal to my wish.
> Moreover, of his poems he hath sold
> Two full editions of a thousand each,
> While mine remain neglected on the shelves!
> Courage, Firmilian, for the hour has come,
> When thou canst know atrocity indeed,
> By smiting him that was thy dearest friend.
> . . . . .
> He must not know with what a loving hand,
> With what fraternal charity of heart
> I do devote him to the infernal gods!
> I dare not spare him one particular pang,
> Nor make the struggle briefer! Hush—he comes.

In the dialogue which ensues, Firmilian is metaphorical and selfish, Haverillo simple and generous as usual. In vain the latter pleads for life. As a last sop to Cerberus, he offers his friend the proceeds of a new edition of his poems. This crowning indignity, so

stinging from a bard with a copyright of value to one whose poems the public will not buy, is fatal, and Firmilian hurls his lyrical friend from the summit of the column. By a fine stroke of poetical justice, the ill-starred Haverillo crushes in his fall "Apollodorus, a critic," as that distinguished dispenser of poetical fame is sending aloft to heaven the following invocation:—

> Pythian Apollo,
> Hear me, oh hear! Towards the firmament
> I gaze with longing eyes; and, in the name
> Of millions thirsting for poetic draughts,
> I do beseech thee, send a poet down!
> Let him descend, e'en as a meteor falls,
> Rushing at noonday——
> (*He is crushed by the fall of the body of Haverillo.*)

The poor graduate meanwhile is brought to the stake for having blown up the cathedral; and having obtained permission to address the crowd, closes his critical career in this appropriate strain:—

> His speech was worse than any commination.
> He cursed the city, and he cursed the church;
> He cursed the houses, and he cursed their stones.
> He cursed, in short, in such miraculous wise,
> That nothing was exempted from his ban.
> Then, sir, indeed the people's wrath was roused,
> And a whole storm of cats came tumbling in,
> Combined with baser missiles. I was fain,
> Not wishing to be wholly singular,
> To add my contribution to the rest.
> Yet he cursed on, till the Familiars gagged him—
> Bound him unto the stake, and so he died.

At last, then, we might have expected to find Firmilian worked up into the poetic paroxysm required

for his antediluvian tragedy. But no: instead of remorse, he feels only triumph, and even Haverillo's exit merely begets the wish that his other creditors might be disposed of in a like summary fashion. He begins to surmise that all is over with "the firstling of his soul—his tragedy," and that his various murders have gone for nothing.

> Alas! I fear
> I have mista'en my bent! What's Cain to me,
> Or I to Cain? I cannot realise
> His wild sensations—it were madness, then,
> For me to persevere. Some other bard
> With weaker nerves and fainter heart than mine
> Must gird him to the task. 'Tis not for me
> To shrine that page of history in song,
> And utter such tremendous cadences,
> That the mere babe who hears them at the breast,
> Sans comprehension, or the power of thought,
> Shall be an idiot to its dying hour!
> I deemed my verse would make pale Hecate's orb
> Grow wan and dark; and into ashes change
> The radiant star-dust of the milky-way.
> I deemed that pestilence, disease, and death,
> Would follow every strophe—for the power
> Of a true poet, prophet as he is,
> Should rack creation!

The question now arises, into what new channel shall Firmilian pour the sprightly runnings of his fancy? A theme of magic is canvassed, and discarded for a grand erotic poem, richer "than ever yet was heard in praise of love," *à propos* of which he delivers this pithy commentary upon our system of classical instruction:—

Let the cold moralists say what they will,
I'll set their practice boldly 'gainst my verse,
And so convict them of hypocrisy.
What text-books read their children at the schools?
Derive they Latin from a hymnal source,
Or from the works of rigid anchorites?
Not so! That hog of Epicurus sty,
The sensuous Horace, ushers them along
To rancid Ovid. He prepares the way
For loose Catullus, whose voluptuous strain
Is soon dismissed for coarser Juvenal.
Take we the other language—is there much
Of moral fervour or devout respect,
That can be gleaned from old Anacreon's lays,
Or Sappho's burning starts? What pious lore
Can the alembic of the sage extract
From the rank filth of Aristophanes?
Is Lucian holy reading? And if not,
Why, in the name of the old garden-god,
Persist they in their system? Pure indeed
Must be the minds of those compelled to wade
Through all the dunghills of antiquity,
If they escape without some lasting stain.
What do our moralists? To make things clear,
Which otherwise might 'scape the youthful sense,
They write Pantheons—wherein you may read,
In most exact and undisguised detail,
The loves of Jove with all his relatives,
Besides some less conspicuous amours
With Danaë, Europa, and the like.
What merrier jests can move the schoolboy's spleen,
Than the rich tale of Vulcan and of Mars;
Or of Apollo, when, in hot pursuit
Of Daphne, 'stead of tresses in his hand,
He found a garland of the laurel leaves?
Well-thumbed, be sure, the precious pages are,
That tell of Venus and of Mercury!
And shall the men, who do not shrink to teach

Such saving doctrine to their tender sons,
Accuse me if I shrine the same in verse,
And with most sweet seductive harmony
Proclaim the reign of Love o'er all the world?

But the Nemesis of the poet is at hand. The Inquisition is on his traces, and the three ladies of his love, Lilian, Mariana, and Indiana, objecting to the Mormonite character of his domestic arrangements, direct the pursuit. The ladies he sends to untimely graves in his own conclusive way. The Familiars of the Inquisition are not, however, so easily dealt with, and the last scene discovers Firmilian lost in mist upon a barren moor, to which he has fled from their pursuit. Here he is lured by *ignes fatui* into a pond in an old quarry, into which, some years before, he had himself lured an old blind beggar, whose importunate prayer for alms had broken the chain of his imaginative meditations.

The main thread of the story is enriched by episodes in which poetical fancy and exquisite versification prevent the continual play of irony from becoming tedious. The poem must always rank as a masterpiece of burlesque. On poets of the spasmodic school—*tribus insanabiles Anticyris*—not even its powerful sarcasm will work a cure. But it deserves to keep its place in literature, if only as showing how easy it is for a man of real poetic power to throw off, in sport, pages of sonorous and sparkling verse, simply by ignoring the fetters of nature and common sense, and dashing headlong on Pegasus through the wilderness of fancy.

Aytoun rested from poetical production for some time after finishing 'Firmilian.' But his pen was active in 'Blackwood's Magazine' month by month, on literature, politics, and art, down to the end of 1855, when he began to write his 'Bothwell.' The following are characteristic examples of his correspondence at this period:—

INGAMP COTTAGE, KIRKWALL,
July 16, 1855.

MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,—We got here in good time on Saturday, after a very smooth passage. . . . . I have not yet got out any kind of tackle, or visited my "favourite lies,"* so that I cannot gratify you by a recital of my astounding feats; but there is a good time coming. We have got two ponies—a very pretty chestnut one for Mrs Aytoun, which we have not yet named, and a bay horse, which formerly carried a deceased minister of the Establishment. His trot is of the hard, Calvinistic kind, distressing to the *os coccygis*, and jolting like the divisions of a fast-day discourse. I have to rise perpendicularly in the stirrups at his "fifteenthly." But I have purveyed me a strong Episcopal whip, and in the course of a few days I hope to teach Ecclesiastes some prelatical paces. . . .

JOHN BLACKWOOD, Esq.

KIRKWALL, *July* 13, 1855.

MY DEAR MARTIN,— . . . We have been here for more than a fortnight; and I cannot tell you how enjoyable these islands are in this sweet summer weather. Kirkwall, like other places, has started a literary institution, and I have been

* When Mr Blackwood visited Aytoun, in Orkney, he was repeatedly taken by his friend to view a bank which Aytoun said was "a favourite lie" of the seals. None of the phocid race, however, were ever to be seen there. At last Mr Blackwood, turning to Mrs Aytoun, said, "Apparently this is a favourite lie of William's, if not of the seals." The phrase became a standing joke between them. Hence the allusion in this letter.

L. E. Lectrifying the natives on ballad poetry, and the old songs of the Norsemen. I am going still farther north to-morrow—to Zetland—with my brother-in-law, John Wilson, who wishes to ransack the lochs in Thule, so that, for ten days at least, our whole talk will be of fish. We have a very pretty little cottage here, with most charming sea and mountainous views; and just beneath us lies the fine old Cathedral of St Magnus, in which the first Christian Earl of Orkney and the Maiden of Norway are interred. It is the sweetest thing in the world to listen to the chiming of the bells.

At the end of 1855 Aytoun sent me the proof-sheets of the first book of his 'Bothwell.' I felt strongly that, in the choice of such a subject, and in dealing with it in the form of a monologue, he had put himself into fetters which would gall him deeper and deeper as he advanced, and I told him so with unreserved frankness. How kindly he took my criticism, the following letter will show:—

EDINBURGH, *January* 8, 1856.

MY DEAR MARTIN,—I am very much obliged to you for your criticism, and it gives me confidence to know that you like 'Bothwell' so far as you have seen it. I am well aware that the form of the poem, which I deliberately adopted, subjects me to great difficulties in composition; and it may be that I cannot overcome them; but, if successful, it will be to a certain extent a triumph, for I do not know of any other poem of considerable length which is constructed on the same plan. I considered very seriously the question how far I could with propriety put any tender or gentle emotions into the mouth of such a character as Bothwell, and, so far as my own judgment goes, I do not think I have erred on the side of softness, at least according to my ideal of the man. Indeed, I have cut out more than one passage of some poetical value, which, on deliberation, seemed to me rather out of keeping, especially as tending towards repentance, or rather penance, after the Roman fashion; and I think I shall be

able to portray him as a consistent character to the last. He was not altogether a ruffian, and there were some few mitigating, if not redeeming, points about him, which I think I ought to bring out, for the public would not excuse me for putting the narrative into lips utterly depraved. My great difficulty hitherto has been this, that in the first and second part I have found it necessary, in one way or another, to explain the position of parties. Without doing this, so intricate is the history of Mary's reign, and so inexplicable the main incidents—such as the murder of Riccio, the alliance of Bothwell with Murray and Morton, the blowing-up of Darnley, the subsequent nuptials, and the story of Carberry Hill—that I could offer to the general reader of the poem no congruity. Therefore you will understand that in these two parts there has been a sacrifice of sharp interest and incident for the sake of elucidation. Possibly this ought to have been managed better, or more dexterously; but a man can only work according to his own ideas, and I could not devise a better method. You shall have more stirring work in the remainder, if I can command the old energy, which is the real feature of the 'Lays.'

I have thought over what you suggest regarding lyrical intermezzos, but my judgment revolts. In a poem of any length unity is a prime consideration; and I agree with the criticism which condemned Scott's introductions to 'Marmion' as out of place.* Besides, I do not want, even constructively, to mix up Mary too much with Bothwell. I think he should speak for himself alone, and die despairing. Besides, Mary survived him for many years. The part which I now enclose comes just to the verge of Darnley's murder; and I shall be very thankful to you for your observations upon it. The next part opens, I think, pretty strong, and I shall take pains to keep it so. The keynote is the suspicion of Bothwell that his jailer has orders to murder him, and I have

* Aytoun had misunderstood my meaning, which was, not that he should follow the example set by Scott in these introductions, but that he should relieve the monotony of his monologue by lyrical fragments or snatches of song, such as might have been sung by Mary, or as might have suggested the emotions and passions by which she was influenced.

avoided the melodramatic temptation of introducing the elements in that part as accessories. I have not yet got much of it done, for my holidays were awfully distracted with the necessary duty of correcting class exercises, and with the more righteous one of advising processes, add to which dinners, more than one-half of which it is impossible to refuse, and you will understand why verse does not flow out like water from the rock when touched by the prophet's wand. But I have been behaving very well, for I have positively interdicted myself from reading Macaulay until I have finished 'Bothwell.' I was, sooth to say, afraid of the "splendida bilis."

Poor John Ross! I heard of his death on Saturday, for the first time, when attending the funeral of our late friend, Edward Fraser. Is it not striking? Three of the most intimate friends at the Scottish bar—Donaldson, Fraser, Ross—all called to their account so early. Poor Ross! I cannot think of him without a pang.

As 'Bothwell' advanced, Aytoun felt more and more the insuperable difficulties of the form of monologue into which he had cast it. Even had his hero been a man of ideal virtue, instead of the coarse, ruthless, unscrupulous ruffian he was, no power of genius could have sustained the interest of his readers, or blinded them to a constantly recurring sense of improbability, in a long poem framed on such a principle. Men do not talk soliloquies. We endure them on the stage solely from the necessity of the case; and the greatest dramatists use them most sparingly. But a lengthened monologue taxes our poetical faith too severely, especially when it professes to deal with complex incidents and a multiplicity of characters. The passionate actor in such a tale as that of Bothwell's was not the man to narrate its incidents, or to draw the men with whom he worked or to whom he was opposed. He was sure

to fall here and there out of his part; and just in proportion as the poet succeeded in doing justice to the other personages of his story, and in enlivening his narrative by bursts of emotion with which we could sympathise, or by passages of picturesque description on which we could dwell with pleasure, he was sure to make us feel that the dramatic truth and unity of his principal character was violated.

Besides all this, Bothwell was not a hero about whom it was possible to feel any concern. Whatever gloss might be put upon his character, the main fact was not to be got over, that he was a thoroughly selfish worthless villain, "bloody, bold, and resolute," and the last man either to feel or to talk, as men must feel and talk who are to engage our sympathies in verse.* It was, therefore, clearly impossible to keep faith with history, and at the same time be in harmony with the laws of poetic art. Bothwell, as a character in a drama, would have given splendid scope for poetical handling. Bothwell in a dungeon, telling his own story, was a mistake. Aytoun struggled gallantly against these difficulties, but they were too much for him. The result was a poem full of passages of great beauty and picturesque force, but the ultimate verdict of the public has declared it unsatisfactory as a whole.

* Bothwell appears to have had some literary taste. He had a library, and a taste, moreover, for fine binding. Two specimens of his collection seem to prove this much. One is in the library of the Edinburgh University, another in the collection of Mr William Gibson-Craig, and they are both, I understand, fine specimens of the bibliopegist's art, and such as bibliomaniacs delight in.

It had, however, on its first appearance, a very considerable success. The brilliancy and vigour of particular passages made readers forget its defects; and, indeed, there were many who thought it not unworthy to take rank with the best things Aytoun had done. Among these was Lord Lytton, to whom the poem was dedicated, and who appears not to have felt the objections which have been generally urged against the poem.

"It is very long indeed," he writes to Aytoun, 19th August 1856, "since I have experienced such delight from the '*Dic, age, tibia.*' I congratulate you heartily. A most masculine performance—the verses ring on the anvil as strokes from the hand of an athlete. The fulness and power of your music are more effective from the variety of sound, obtained, too, without one of the affectations which disfigure contemporaneous song. The stern simplicity of the historical recitals enhances the singular sweetness of the more pathetic portions, and you have kept Bothwell grandly uniform and consistent throughout. You have dealt, indeed, with the history, just as I think genuine art should deal with it, and in the same spirit with which Shakespeare took a chronicle according to his belief in its truth, and then made the hearts of the characters speak out, reconciling act to thought and emotion. Believe me, it is altogether a great work."

This opinion, from one whose judgment Aytoun esteemed so highly, must have acted as a counterpoise to the adverse criticism with which the poem was received. When his friend and publisher sent him the

various reviews by the leading journals, he was by no means dissatisfied, as the following letter shows, with the general verdict:—

KIRKWALL, *August* 24, 1856.

MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,— . . . I got, along with your last letter, the notices of 'Bothwell,' and I really can see no reason to complain, but the reverse. On the whole, it is most favourably noticed, and that in a manner which is most gratifying to me. Because, in the general case, when a new volume of poetry is published, the critics display a wonderful unanimity in their selection of extracts, whereas, in the case of Bothwell, there is an immense diversity of opinion as to which passages are the best. That is proof of the existence of the variety, which was part of my deliberate design; and I was not sure that I had attained it until I saw these critiques. There is, of course, a good deal of absurd criticism, because not one writer out of ten, if so many, has the least idea of art; and accordingly some of them blame, as being too mean for poetry, passages which were purposely freed from every atom of cream. Some of them say that there is a lack of dramatic talent. By St Bartholomew, these are rare fellows! Was I to represent Bothwell as acting a charade in his dungeon? I now hope and think that the poem will take a permanent place, though it may never be so popular as the 'Lays.' . . .

But Aytoun, at heart, was never thoroughly satisfied with his work, and he seems to have expressed this feeling very strongly in writing to Lord Lytton; for, in a letter on the 26th November 1856, his lordship appears to have thought it necessary to discourage the tone of despondency with which Aytoun had written of his poem. "I could allow," he says, "no one but yourself to speak so depreciatingly of 'Bothwell;' and, indeed, I have heard no one do so. I apprehend that

it is never a question whether or not a poem has faults. The question with true critics and with Time is—'What the number and degree of its beauties.'" True criticism couched in most kindly phrase. But Aytoun was too severe a critic on himself to rest contented with his first sketch. Accordingly, when a call arose for a third edition of the poem, he revised it thoroughly, and rewrote considerable portions of it with advantage to the general effect. In his preface to this edition he makes the following frank acknowledgment of his obligations to his critics—a frankness characteristic of the true artist:—

I have to thank those of my reviewers who, in a spirit of honesty and kindness, have referred to my defects; for by doing so I must needs acknowledge that they have rendered me an essential service. In these days of voluminous publication, criticism is valuable to the reader, inasmuch as it places *him* on his guard; but it is invaluable to every author who has the sincere desire of cultivating his art to the utmost of his ability, because it warns him of the faults that are the most glaringly conspicuous in his style, and rebukes him for every instance of undue carelessness or neglect. The best proof of my acquiescence in the justice of some of the remarks upon the construction of certain passages of 'Bothwell,' is the fact that I have made emendations accordingly; but, beyond that, I have altered or recast many passages against which no censure was directed. The truth is that, on the eve of publication, I did not feel by any means satisfied with my own performance. I had an instinctive feeling that I ought to have done better. I was conscious that occasionally the expression did not adequately convey the idea, and that the versification was sometimes defective both in melody and power. But there is a peculiarity attendant upon poetical composition which is well known to those who practise it, though it may not be so to the general reader—and that

is, that a certain period must elapse before the writer can discern the precise nature of his faults, or regain the power of correcting them. So long as the heat engendered by the original effort is upon him, his attempts at emendation will be vain. But after a time, unless he is vainglorious and egotistical in the extreme, the faults he has committed become as apparent to him as they were to others; and surely then it is his duty to retrieve such faults, or at least to make the attempt, although it is quite possible that he may not succeed in doing this in a manner commensurate with his desire.

The letter of the 24th August 1856, above quoted, passes from criticism to grouse-shooting, than which "mellow metres" themselves were not more dear to the overtasked literary man and professor.

So much for business—now for minor personalities. Hamley has not arrived, whereat I own I grumble, seeing that I had arranged my courts, visits, &c., to suit him, and must now either forego the moors for a week, or range them without a companion. I think I see your falcon eyes glitter at my being compelled to write for the next week to come! Know, most noble Festus, that I shall do nothing of the kind, for, to say the truth, I worked harder and more incessantly last winter and spring than was altogether good for me, and when I came here I found myself not quite the thing. I mean physically and comparatively, for, at the worst, I could have walked down three Cockneys one after the other, but my muscles were feeble and flabby, and energy difficult to be aroused. I am, however, by this time qualified to grapple with a walrus; but I need air, and above all things exercise. . . . I have now got most of my courts over, and yesterday was out on the moors. I walked incessantly from eleven to six, and was not very successful; however, I brought home three brace of grouse, and three of your friends the golden plovers. I was not, however, on good ground, and I hope to do much better on Tuesday. I give you my honour, that *laziness* shall not interfere to prevent me writing; but I

must get up my pluck and fortify my sinews for the coming campaign; and though Hamley, who is a mere stripling, could write after a hot day's fighting in the Crimea, I cannot undertake to produce anything better than drivel after a long stretch on the heather. Besides, there is deep joy in grouse-pie, when flanked by a flask of claret.

CHAPTER VII.

INTRODUCTION TO COL. HAMLEY—ACCOUNT OF HIM BY THE LATTER—THE SALOON AT GEORGE STREET—HIS SUPPOSED EDITORSHIP OF BLACKWOOD—HIS HOME HABITS—AS A LECTURER AND TEACHER—AT "HIGH JINKS" AND IN HIS STUDY—FISHING AND SHOOTING IN ORKNEY—HIS LIFE THERE—"THE LAIRD OF M'NAB"—RENEWED LITERARY LABOURS—COLLECTION AND EDITING OF THE SCOTTISH BALLADS—HIS MOTHER—THE GOETHE BALLADS—LETTER FROM HIS OLD GERMAN TUTOR—HIS GROWING REPUTATION—HIS APPEARANCE AT THE MANCHESTER ATHENÆUM AND AT THE BURNS CENTENARY FESTIVAL.

COLONEL E. B. HAMLEY, who, on his return from the Crimea, had made Aytoun's acquaintance during a visit to their common friend Mr John Blackwood, writes:—

"My acquaintance with Professor Aytoun, which in a very short time ripened into cordial intimacy, began in December 1855. I was then on a visit to Mr Blackwood, and Aytoun coming in on his way home from church, the day after my arrival, we met in the library. The tone of his critical and political papers, at once gay and bold, and the chivalrous cast of his poetry, had led me to figure to myself a man alert, self-confident, and self-asserting, with a jovial resolute bearing: whereas the real Professor, sober in gait, slow

and gentle of voice, and with a student-like stoop in his shoulders, advanced as shyly as a young girl, and when I endeavoured to express my especial pleasure in making the acquaintance of one whose writings had so frequently compelled my interest and admiration, my attempted compliments were received with a reserve which might have caused me to fancy that they were displeasing, but which was in truth only a thin crust over a very genial affectionate nature. He quickly thawed (though not, I think, at that interview), and during the rest of my sojourn in Edinburgh, which my removal on duty to Leith Fort, shortly after, prolonged very much beyond my expectation, my excellent hosts, the Blackwoods and Aytouns, extended to me a hospitality which a friend of a much older date than myself would have felt to be of the warmest and most generous kind. For this, I was at first, in great measure, indebted to a lameness and broken health, the results of foreign service, which procured me so much kindness from my benevolent hostesses, and so consoling a degree of domestication at their firesides, as I could scarcely have hoped to enjoy but for the demand which my somewhat disastrous plight made on their womanly sympathies. At both houses a room was allotted to me, and thus it came to pass that almost as soon as I knew Aytoun I felt at home with him.

"At this time he must have lost a good deal of the robust health and the elasticity of spirits of his earlier days. He did not look more than his age, his colour

was still fresh, and his brown hair was neither thinned nor silvered; but he was extremely indisposed to exertion. While in Edinburgh, he could rarely be induced to extend his day's exercise beyond the walk home from the University to his house in Great Stuart Street. He made constant use of his brougham for going short distances; a habit only very recently assumed, and one in which his friends did their best to discourage him, believing that he was thus sacrificing his best chance of health. His journey home on foot was almost invariably broken by a halt at the saloon, at 45 George Street, a room in Mr Blackwood's establishment hung with portraits of contributors to the Magazine. Many of these were then no more: Christopher North, their acknowledged chief, whose admirable portrait by Watson Gordon hung over the fireplace, was just dead—Lockhart and Cyril Thornton (Hamilton) and the Ettrick Shepherd, whose cunning effigies were on the walls, had gone before him; but the glories of what had been the gymnasium of the Modern Athens had by no means departed. De Quincey, though a rare visitor, still lived near; Alison would come from Glasgow, and Ferrier (most genial of all who flit forth into day from the twilight land of metaphysics) from the learned seclusion of St Andrews: Warren and Gleig, powerful contributors of earlier times, and Bulwer, an illustrious auxiliary of more recent date, might at periods of migration be found there; and Thackeray, when he brought his gallery of Georges to Edinburgh, was a

constant and honoured guest. Of the supporters of the Magazine resident in Edinburgh, Lord Neaves and George Moir, both intimate friends of Aytoun, were frequently to be found at 45 George Street, which was also the resort of the Rev. James White, whose powers of entertainment few ecclesiastics have rivalled; of Burton, the latest historian of Scotland; and of Henry Stephens, author of the 'Book of the Farm,' the gospel, in these days, of those who till the ground. Many, too, of the illustrious obscure class, whose wits crop up anonymously in periodicals, but who do not attain to the dignity of independent authorship, would enter from time to time; but nobody was so habitual an occupant of a chair there as Aytoun, who was bound to the place by the double tie of long friendship with the editor, and a connection with the Magazine so close and constant that, as in the case of Wilson, the contributor had become identified with the periodical in the public mind, and the presumed editorship of Christopher North, which never had any real existence, descended by apostolical succession on his eminent son-in-law. This delusion not only entailed on him an amount of correspondence which was occasionally very troublesome, but charged him with the authorship of all papers in 'Blackwood' wherein any of the characteristics of his style were supposed to be visible, so that, as great sayers of sayings, such as Selwyn and Sheridan and Sydney Smith, are credited with all the fatherless wit of their respective times, the reputation of Aytoun absorbed by its powerful attraction all fragments of

matter similar to his own which entered the common system.

"He was at that time engaged, to the exclusion of article-writing, on the earlier cantos of 'Bothwell,' of which he sometimes read parts to a small domestic audience. Never, of all the irritable race, was there a poet who submitted more amiably to criticism. No doubt he was really sensitive enough, as all men are, and must be, who are gifted with the vision and the faculty divine; but, while taking our praise in modest silence, he would often grant the justice of an objection, and when doing battle in behalf of his own lines, defended them as if they had been the work of a stranger. To the objection I ventured to offer to the plan of the poem, that the reader would never be able to escape in spirit from the dungeon in which the opening lines immured the narrator, Bothwell, he responded that it was certainly an experiment, and perhaps a doubtful one, but the work had gone too far for recasting, and he evidently trusted to the beauty of individual passages to redeem a radical fault of construction which he afterwards freely acknowledged.

"The poet's life was very far indeed from being in unison with the stormy career of his hero Bothwell, or the heroic endurance and adventure of Montrose and Dundee, for nothing could be easier than his existence. His excellent wife, herself of a disposition and qualities to illuminate any household, whose kind, bright, genial face was the faithful index of her heart, took care that his home should always be of the cosiest and

pleasantest, and made his friends her own. Among other comfortable circumstances, he was treated by his lady friends with a pleasant deference; his graceful poetry, the nature of its subjects, picturesque and chivalrous, and his Jacobitism, all appealed to their imaginations, and his soft and gentle manners confirmed the spell. In the careless ease of his household life, he rarely made his appearance early in the morning, and on coming down stairs proceeded to his study, where he passed most of the day until it was time to start for his lecture at four o'clock. I once accompanied him to his lecture-room and sat beside him, while in front of us gathered an audience most respectfully attentive, and who, somewhat to my surprise, evinced their approval of certain brilliant passages of the discourse by a loud and general clattering of their feet. Lecturing no doubt was a pleasure to him, and he did it well; but another portion of his duties must have been less congenial, for I used to see his table loaded for weeks together with the books in which the members of his class wrote their essays, and which he was at great pains to correct. In general company he was rather silent, seeming to lack the alertness of spirit which impels a man to distinguish himself socially; and even with a few old friends he was always as well content to listen as to talk, though quite ready to take and to enjoy his share in any intellectual discussion; and on these occasions of easy discourse with those he liked, he was a delightful companion, never disputatious, ready at the give

and take which is the charm of social talk, conversant with an immense range of subjects, and apt to illustrate all by some of those quaint humorous turns which are the distinctive feature of his articles. One of his most ancient and familiar cronies was Mr Peter Fraser, whose visits were generally celebrated by a lapse into what Mrs Aytoun termed their 'high jinks,' which, as I understood it, meant a delivering of themselves up to extravagant drollery. Peter was a facetious spirit of great local repute, well known, too, to a large circle of friends in London, and to one of his humorous feats I was witness. Thackeray, during his Georgian era in Edinburgh, was Mr Blackwood's guest; and one evening, when the ladies had left us over our claret, a ring was heard, followed by a controversy at the street door between the visitor and the butler, who presently came in and announced that the Provost of Peterhead wished to see Mr Thackeray. The novelist, having already undergone considerable persecution at the hands of his Scottish admirers, broke out upon this into exasperation, and desired the butler to say that he was engaged, and could not, in fact would not, see the gentleman. The applicant, however, persisted, positively refusing to depart without an interview; and Thackeray, being at last induced to go into the hall, was immediately heard in indignant remonstrance. 'Sir,' he said in loud tones, 'I will not be persecuted in this way. You have no right to annoy me;' and then was heard a scuffle and clattering of umbrella-stands and

barometers which brought the ladies in alarm from the drawing-room, their frightened faces appearing over the bannisters, and drew host and guests from their wine; when in this persevering Provost, then engaged in a mock combat with the illustrious object of his search, we recognised the mad wag Peter, with whom, at the termination of the conflict, we returned in triumph to the claret. When Peter came to Aytoun's of an evening, they would act extempore dramas, supporting improvised and independent parts, cursing and defying each other with melodramatic energy, and generally ending the performance with a murder or combat, in which paper-cutters were the instruments of blood. An audience of one or two was all they required on these occasions; indeed I imagine that any audience at all was not an indispensable condition. Though equally ready for high jinks on the one hand, or for the sagest conversation on the other, there was one class of his fellow-creatures that Aytoun could not away with—what he termed 'haverers,' that is, dull or silly chatterers (*unde derivatur* HAVERILLO, the friend and victim of Firmilian) to whose inflictions he submitted outwardly with characteristic patience, but whom he would afterwards denounce as 'bauldies,' by which term the Scotch designate those natural imbeciles who are to be found in most parishes, and whose title we may account for by supposing that there once existed a fool called Archibald of so illustrious an idiocy that his baptismal appellation, thus familiarised, came to be the badge of all his tribe. Aytoun generally spent the latter part of

his evening, often the whole of it, in his study, writing, or more often reading (he told me he always read through all Scott's novels once a-year), in company with an old white setter called Captain, whose intellects were somewhat impaired by age. Another four-footed associate was a little black-and-tan cur of the name of Doddles, advanced in years, most plebeian in aspect, and inhospitable in demeanour, but to whom every virtue and accomplishment, human as well as canine, was attributed by his devoted master and mistress. Doddles spent most of his time in a comfortable basket in the drawing-room, and was therefore less of a companion than Captain, who, besides attending in the hours of composition, also accompanied Aytoun, as an auxiliary of great value, in the sporting excursions which he made once or twice a-year.

"His shrievalty in Orkney entailed an annual visit thither, where in the autumn of 1856 I joined him and Mrs Aytoun at a small villa outside of Kirkwall. We had sea-fishing for sillocks and trout-fishing in the lochs, when Aytoun proved himself an artist with the fly-rod, and Mrs Aytoun, intrusted with the net, landed our fish with a skill to be expected from a daughter of Christopher North. Once the Professor and I made an excursion of a few days' duration to some of the more distant islands, taking our guns, and accompanied by Captain, whose traditionary reputation for powers of scent and stanchness stood high, but whose nose, in these his declining years, frequently led him into unaccountable errors, while his deafness rendered

all attempts on our part to correct them unavailing, though his master's steady affection and confidence, of long growth, were not to be shaken by a few mistakes, over which, whenever possible, he threw a decent veil. Aytoun was a good shot, with a great taste for sport in all its aspects, but had at this time, along with his activity, lost much of his keenness; he was slow in taking aim, and at the same time would not fire at long range, so that a good many birds got away from him without any attempt on their lives. Seeing this, and being myself rather an eager sportsman, I took some shots that perhaps strictly belonged to him; and whether this put him out, or whether he was really indifferent to the sport, I don't know; but towards the close of the day he frequently seated himself on a bank of heather with his gun across his knees, regardless of the grouse that more than once whizzed past; lost, perhaps, in contemplation of the fate of Bothwell, of whose captivity these islands were the scene. On our way home one afternoon, crossing a bald bit of moorland, Captain suddenly became transfixed, in a model attitude, with his nose directed towards the only tuft which broke the smooth surface for acres round. As it was no larger than one's fist, it seemed impossible that anything of the nature of game should be harboured there; but Aytoun, confident in the sagacity of his canine friend, stood ready to shoot, till, stealthily approaching the tuft, I got close enough to poke the muzzle of my gun through it, when forth issued an exceedingly small field-mouse. The Professor's smile was very faint, and

tinctured with mortification at this palpable proof of the decadence of his old and trusted associate. That evening we slept at the house of a farmer named Lesk, a simple and hospitable Scandinavian, who gave us his company over a glass of toddy after our supper of fresh herrings and grilled grouse, and who did not appear to consider the full gratification of his curiosity respecting Aytoun's private affairs at all inconsistent with his respect for so high a functionary as the Sheriff. 'Hae ye got a mistress, Mister Shirra?' was one of the interrogatories put by his inquisitor, who meant nothing worse than to ask if he was married. Knowing that I was noting such passages of the conversation as these to retail in future, Aytoun prepared a counter-battery, and used to retort upon me with an imaginary dialogue in which I was represented as narrating to Gudeman Lesk warlike feats of my own, worthy of a Bobadil. Finally we were conveyed to Kirkwall again, in the yacht of a harum-scarum friend of Aytoun's, who crossed an exceedingly stormy frith under a press of canvass that kept our gunwale at the water's edge, and the Sheriff on his beam-ends, during the whole passage.

"No doubt these official excursions, drawing him annually from his desk or his lecture-room, and forcing him to take the air and exercise of which he was too neglectful at home, retarded for years the progress of the disease which at last overmastered him. Often I look back to the pleasant primitive life we led in Orkney; days of walking or riding on ponies over

those treeless islands, which, viewed from the summit of the hill near Aytoun's villa, spread themselves below like a chart rather than a landscape; our visits to the lairds, simple and kindly Northmen, one of whom, Mr Balfour, a great friend of Aytoun's, had just built on an island in Kirkwall Harbour, no bigger than a lawn, a mansion fit for a duke; our cosy little meals, largely supplied from our day's sport, trout and sillocks, grouse and golden plover; and the evenings when, in a boat or at home, we discoursed soberly of politics and literature, or exchanged quips and cranks as the humour led us, in what was perhaps the most intimate phase of our friendship. Besides his functions as Sheriff, Aytoun was *ex officio* Lord High Admiral of Orkney, and to this he alluded in 1860, when, in reviewing Lord Dundonald's Memoirs, he remarked of himself, as writer of the article, that 'his naval rank was nearer that of his Lordship than he might be aware,'* no doubt puzzling many a reader by the attempt to guess who the nautical veteran could be that so pleasantly and easily wielded the pen."

Colonel Hamley's mention of the drolleries improvised by Aytoun and Mr Peter Fraser will recall to Aytoun's friends many a scene of "most excellent

* "Literature and history alike will sustain a great loss if this autobiography is not completed; and we trust that Lord Dundonald may be spared to give us another, if not a third volume, and that we (*id est*, the writer of this article, whose naval rank is nearer that of his Lordship than he may be aware), may survive to review the same, and give it as hearty commendation as we bestow on the fragmentary portion which has appeared."—Review of 'The Autobiography of a Seaman,' Blackwood's Magazine, Feb. 1860.

fooling." Aytoun had considerable histrionic talent. From boyhood upwards he was great in acted charades, in which his admirable assumptions of eccentric character, male or female, and his ready flow of humour and playful repartee, lifted the impersonation far above the ordinary level of such performances. His powers in this way were sometimes used to mystify strangers as to the national peculiarities with a rather reckless daring, as in the following instance. Being asked to get up an impromptu amusement at a friend's house, in 1844, for some English visitors who were enthusiastic about Highlanders and the Highlands, he fished out from his wardrobe the identical kilt with which he had electrified the men of Thurso in his boyish days.* Arraying himself in this, and a blue cloth jacket with white metal buttons, which he had got years before to act a charity boy in a charade, he completed his costume by a scarf across his shoulders, short hose, and brogues! The brevity of the kilt produced a most ludicrous effect, and not being eked out with the usual "sporran," left him very much in the condition of the "Cutty Sark" of Burns's poem. With hair, like Katterfelto's, on end in wild disorder, Aytoun was ushered into the drawing-room. He bore himself with more than Celtic dignity, and saluted the Southrons with stately courtesy, being introduced to them as the famous Laird of M'Nab. The ladies were delighted with the chieftain, who related many highly exciting traits of Highland manners. Among other things,

* See p. 27, *ante*.

when his neighbours, as he told them, made a foray, which they often did, upon his cattle, he thought nothing "of sticking a tirk into their powels." When the ladies exclaimed in horror, "Oh, laird, you don't say so?" "Say so?" he replied, "On my sawl, laties, and to pe surely, I *to* it." A picture of Prince Charlie which hung in the room was made the object of profound veneration. At supper he was asked to sing a song: "I am fery sorry, laties," he replied, "that I have no voice, but I will speak to you a translation of a fery ancient Gaelic poem," and proceeded to chant "The Massacre of ta Phairshon," which came upon all present as if it were the invention of the moment, and was greeted with roars of laughter. The joke was carried on until the party broke up; and the strangers were not undeceived for some days as to the true character of the great Celtic chief.

After the pause of a few months from literary labour, which Aytoun claimed as necessary for his health after the publication of 'Bothwell,' he resumed his pen with his wonted activity. In the first six months of 1857, he wrote no fewer than eleven articles for 'Blackwood,' one of them a long and telling political squib called "All Fools' Day, a Political Pantomime," which, like all political squibs that are most effective when they first appear, seems somewhat flat and vapid when events have passed into new phases, when new combinations of party have been formed, and the personages have either been ousted from prominence by new men, or the passions they

provoked have given place to the toleration with which we inevitably regard the events of the past.

In the summer of 1857, Aytoun entered on a task of a more permanent interest, which was thoroughly congenial to his tastes—the preparation of an edition of Scottish Ballads. Mr Peter Buchan, in the preface to his 'Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland,' has said, "No one has yet conceived, nor has it entered into the mind of man, what patience, perseverance, and general knowledge are necessary for a collection of ancient ballads." Aytoun entertained a more reasonable estimate of the difficulties that awaited him. Much had been already done to his hands by former editors in bringing together the crude materials for such a work as he contemplated. But their works were a vast storehouse in which good, bad, and indifferent had been amassed; where side by side with the authentic measures of the great nameless minstrels lay the modern imitation, or, what was still worse, the commonplace workmanship of feeble versemongers grafted on the noble torsos of antiquity. Aytoun was just the man to winnow the wheat from the chaff, and to bring together all the best and most characteristic ballads. He had the intuitive tact to discriminate the genuine from the spurious, and the poetical faculty to make the best choice among many various readings. He took the greatest pains to produce a fine selection, and it appeared in the summer of 1858 in two compendious volumes, with a preface and excellent notes. His mother's recollection was often appealed to in

settling disputed readings, and to her the work was dedicated in a few simple words of warm affection. The good old lady used to say, in these days, that a visit from him always acted like a glass of champagne upon her. His talk had very much that effect upon all his friends, for he had always something bright and pleasant to say, whatever trouble there might be at his own heart. But in his bearing to her, as I have seen it, there was a gentle playfulness mixed with reverential affection which was especially charming. I find among his papers the following letter addressed to him about this time—she was then in her 87th year—with the gift of a Bible, to replace that which she had given him in his childhood. It is written in full vigorous characters, in which there is no trace of age.

My dearest William,—I see the Bible of your early days is now (as it should be) well worn, and it gratifies me much to renew it, with my warmest blessing and sincere prayer that its most precious promises may be yours now and ever.

Many happy years may you and yours enjoy, and when our race here is accomplished, may we all meet a family in heaven! Ever, dearest William, your affectionate mother,

Joan Aytoun, Born Nov. 1770.

28 Inverleith Row,
1 *Jan.* 1857.

Happy mother, who through time and change could so retain her first hold upon the affections of her son; happy son, to whom so fond and wise a mother was so long spared to love!

The autumn of 1858 again brought me into literary partnership with my old friend. A reprint, with ex-

tensive additions, of our translation of Goethe's ballads and minor poems, which had appeared in 'Blackwood' in 1843-44, was resolved upon. Aytoun set about his part of the task with unusual vigour, and, although oppressed with other work, and overshadowed, as I soon afterwards too sadly learned, by a great domestic anxiety, he executed many new translations with a rapidity and finish for which, even with all my previous knowledge of what he could do, I was not prepared. It was no ordinary pleasure to me to find myself discussing with him again the old topics which had been so often canvassed between us fifteen years before. Busy men as we both were, he in Edinburgh, I in London, we had seen but little of each other in the interval, nor had our letters to each other been many. But with his constant and affectionate nature this was of little moment. When we did meet, I always found in him the same frankness and cordiality as in the days when we were inseparable, and his letters, like his talk, ever brought him close to your heart. To meet again on the old ground revived all the feelings of the old days.

> He talked with open heart, and tongue
> Affectionate and true,

as though we were rambling together, in the days when "life was all before us," by Salisbury Crags or the shores of the Firth of Forth. And when our little venture was launched, and he had to report that nearly the whole edition had gone off at once, he spoke my feeling not less than his own when he added, "All

this is very gratifying; but to me the most gratifying circumstance connected with the publication is, that you and I, such old friends and fellow-workers, should have stuck together in spite of separation (rather a bull, by the way), and have finished in maturity what we began in comparative youth, without the slightest alteration of our reciprocal confidence and esteem."

Aytoun put some of his best and most careful work into this book, and he was proud of it.

"I am generally," he wrote to me 17th December 1858, "a severe critic of my own writings. I was satisfied that 'Bothwell' was an ambitious failure when I sent it to press; but I swear by our Goethian productions, barring, perhaps, half-a-dozen immaterial scraps. We may hang out our shields, as at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and without any fear await the coming of challengers who shall contrast their performances with ours."

While Aytoun was making a name for himself, his career had not been unobserved by his old friend, Professor Merkel, of Aschaffenburg. An introduction to the old gentleman which Aytoun had given to an Edinburgh friend, led to a renewal of their correspondence. In the following charming letter, Merkel dwells with excusable pride on the triumphs of the pupil of whose powers he had twenty years before formed the highest opinion.*

* See *ante*, p. 46. The original letter is in these terms:—

ASCHAFFENBURG, 8 *Oct.* 1858.

LIEBER AYTOUN,—Bald werden es 20 Jahre seyn dass ich Sie, mein unvergessner Freund, zum letztenmale gesehen! Wie vieles ist seitdem geschehen! Sie sind auf der glänzenden Bahn des Ruhmes weit vorangeschritten, und mit wahren Vergnügen habe ich die Nachrichten von Ihren neuen Werken gelesen. Ein sehr geschätzter Freund hat mir

ASCHAFFENBURG, *8th Oct.* 1858.

DEAR AYTOUN,—It will soon be twenty years, my unforgotten friend, since I saw you last. How much has happened since that time! You have advanced far upon the shining path of fame, and I have read with sincere satisfaction the accounts of your recent works. A very dear friend has made me a present of your 'Bothwell,' but your 'Lays and Ballads' I do not yet know. I am now very old, but still the same, and it would rejoice me not a little to see my dear mental foster-son once more. Mr T. P—— will tell you much, and he has made me very happy by his news of you. I have selected the "kind, honest, fascinating German," trusting that you have as little forgotten your German as your devoted old friend,

DR MERKEL, *Professor.*

Aytoun visited his old friend in 1862; and it is hard to say to which of the two the meeting gave the most pleasure.

After Professor Wilson's death, Aytoun had taken his place as the leading literary man in Scotland. He was not without honour in his own country. Not only was it proud of him for adding a new name to the roll of Scottish poets, but it loved him for the wise zeal with which he had at all times advocated its interests, and for the generous sympathy which, true Conservative as he was, he had always shown for the welfare and social advancement of all who live by toil. Some-

Ihren 'Bothwell' zum Geschenke gemacht; Ihre 'Lays und Ballads' kenne ich aber noch nicht. Ich bin schon recht alt, aber noch der nämliche, und würde mich nicht wenig freuen, meinen lieben geistigen Pflegsohn wieder einmal zu sehen. Hr. Th. P—— wird Ihnen Manches erzählen, und er hat mir durch seine Nachrichten über sie grosse Freude gemacht. Ich habe das "kind, honest, fascinating German" gewählt, in dem Vertrauen dass sie so wenig das Deutsche vergessen haben als Ihren engebenen alten Freund, DR MERKEL, *Prof.*

thing, too, was no doubt due to the fact that he had remained among them, heading the now comparatively scanty ranks of Scottish literary men. He used to maintain, that any local reputation he had was chiefly due to the fact that there was no one to dispute the palm with him. "I am getting a kind of fame," he wrote to me in November 1858, "as the literary man of Scotland. Thirty years ago, in the northern counties, a fellow achieved an immense reputation as 'The Tollman,' being the solitary individual entitled by law to levy black mail at a ferry." This view of the case must not, however, be taken too literally. Sir Archibald Alison, Lord Neaves, Mr George Moir, intimate and valued friends of Aytoun, and whose great talents he held in the highest respect, continued to maintain honourably the reputation for letters by which their country had long been distinguished. Professor Blackie, Mr John Hill Burton, and others of Aytoun's friends, all resident Scotchmen, were also doing good service in the same field. But their gifts were of a less popular kind than Aytoun's, and excited a less cordial interest than those of the poet who had found a voice for strong national feelings, and the humorist who had embodied many of the quaintest aspects of the national character.

This reputation had its drawbacks, not the least of which, in Aytoun's estimate, was the claim made upon him, from all parts of the country, to speak in public assemblies. It is to a display of this kind at the Manchester Athenæum on the 21st October 1858, that

he alludes in the following letter. The other speakers on the occasion were, Lord Stanley of Alderley (Chairman), Lord John Russell, Judge Haliburton (Sam Slick), Sir James Brooke, Lord Houghton, and George Cruickshank.

17th November 1858.

My dear Robertson,—Thou art pleased, oh my Fowde,* to be complimentary on my recent public appearance. I really could not help going to Manchester. The people there, heaven knows why, seem to have had a kind of curiosity regarding me, the late invitation being by no means the first which I have received from them. I have, as you know, a real dislike to public displays; but one may carry the system of keeping within the shell too far; and besides that, I confess to you that I wanted to try what effect I could produce upon an audience speaking directly after Lord John Russell, as I was told I should have to do. So I accepted and went to Manchester. I behaved, however, with perfect fairness. I did not write one word of my speech, and only began to consider what I should say on the morning of the day when the meeting was held. I was quite at ease, though it was an awful assemblage. After I had listened to Lord John for five minutes,—"Is that your style?" thought I. "Oh, hang it, it is no credit whatever to trump you." So I gave them about half an hour of it with as little trepidation as if I had been lecturing to my class. I think they liked it; at any rate I was enthusiastically greeted, both when I came forward and when I sat down. I afterwards got a paper containing a somewhat high-flown account of the meeting, which I cut out and now enclose, as it may amuse you. Please send it back, for I have not yet shown it to my dear old mother, whose over-fondness for her son is now a source of absolute pleasure to her. She was ailing a little lately, but is now much better.

Mrs Aytoun's health has, I am thankful to say, improved very

* Fowde or Foud,—collector of the King's Skatt, afterwards Chief-Judge, and ultimately Sheriff of the Foudries of Zetland. Aytoun generally addressed his Sheriff-Substitute by this name.

decidedly. In fact, she is convalescent, and in the opinion of the doctors time only is required to make her quite right again. . . . I therefore confidently cherish the hope that next season (D.V.) we may be able to visit Orkney, and make it our summer residence as before. I do assure you that I pined sorely for it in August. . . .

——— and his winsome wife are in lodgings near us, and quite well. —— is rosy and plump as an apple; and his wife, from being very delicate, is an absolute wonder of strength—a Boadicea, sir, a Semiramis, a Grace Maddox (surnamed by Pierce Egan the Pet of the Fancy). You are probably aware that Grace knocked the wind out of Ned Figgins, the Dartmouth Kid, in seven rounds. Dr Candlish has a lock of her hair in a brooch, and sports it in his shirt o' Sundays.

Anything more? I think not. According to old rules I should have begun by telling you about the weather, which with us is regular winter—cold, raw, and shiveracious. In Italy and France there have been already falls of snow, so we may look out for squalls. But in the blissful islands—the happy Hesperides—blessed in their Lawmann,* but doubly blessed in their Fowde, doubtless there is perpetual spring. I see you, revered one, under the shadow of the fig-tree at your door, crushing into a golden cup the fruitage of the magnificent vine which canopies your dwelling, and gazing luxuriously, and yet somewhat critically, upon the floating forms of the Bayaderes of Kirkwall, whom, after their brief career of excusable iniquity is over, you, with that fine indulgence which distinguishes the disciples of Calvin, will bestow in marriage with a holy benediction. In you alone I recognise the union of the ancient and modern tendencies, for in your person only are Anacreon and Knox reconciled. Vale, quoth the Lawmann.

Some passages of the "high-flown account" of the Manchester meeting, to which Aytoun here refers, are sufficiently graphic. The writer is manifestly a "kindly

* Lawmann, the President of the Althing, Keeper and Expounder of the Law-book, and Chief-Judge of Orkney—an office now merged in that of the Sheriff.

Scot," proud to see his countryman hold his own among the eminent men who were ranged beside him. "At the bidding of the chairman," he writes, "Professor Aytoun stands forward and prepares to speak. There is a bluff boldness about him, and the Lancashire men at once and instinctively recognise in that independent and manly bearing a man after their own heart. As the speaker looks round for a moment on the noble and lofty proportions of the magnificent hall, and then casts his glance across the sea of upturned faces which stretches over the spacious area, and next surveys the far-extending galleries, fringed on this occasion with a beautiful bevy of Lancashire witches, for a moment he is evidently astonished. He has just come from the far-off Orkneys, and the contrast between *that* and *this* strikes his poetic mind. There, a scanty population and nature's almost unbroken silences; here, the noise and roar of a vast industry, and the mighty hum of many men. He begins apologetically, and talks for a little on education. . . . But as he leaves everyday topics, and speaks of the mighty masters who have peopled the realms of imagination with the creations of genius, there is felt throughout the immense meeting that now in their very presence is one touched with the fire of the old poets—one 'loved of the muses, a master of song.' . . . We may say of him that 'he spoke like a king in his conquering hour.' As the orator finished, the pent-up excitements of the vast auditory found vent in loud and long-continued cheers, and we noticed that one of the most enthusiastic in his

plaudits was ‚my Lord John Russell." Aytoun's speech was mainly directed to urging on the members of the Athenæum the importance of studying the great English classical writers, and warning them against the mental decrepitude likely to result from the too prevailing habit of reading periodical literature, written, as he observed, "merely to meet the necessities of the hour."

Aytoun was soon afterwards called upon to preside at the Burns Centenary Festival at Ayr. The occasion must have recalled, not without feelings of sadness, the last time he had visited the Banks of Doon to take part in a similar ceremony. Wilson and Lord Eglinton, whose eloquence had made memorable the Festival of 1844—Wilson, the idol of Aytoun's youthful imagination, the father of the wife he loved—Eglinton, the high-hearted friend, in whom he revered all the qualities which ennobled that pure and chivalrous spirit,—were no longer there. The one had departed into "the silent land;" the other, soon to follow, in shaken health and spirits, shrank from the fatigue of such public displays. To stand where these men had stood, and to speak of Burns to many who had heard these men speak of him, was no common ordeal. But Aytoun rose to the occasion, and found eloquent expression for the enthusiasm of the hour. In a letter sending me a report of the proceedings, he wrote as follows (4th February 1859):—

"I am most thankful that the Burns affair is over. It was a great nuisance to be dragged to Ayr in the middle of winter; but

I had promised, and there was no help for it. Our meeting was most enthusiastic. I send you the 'Ayrshire Express' with a tolerable report of it. I spoke, as I always do now, without having committed anything to paper; therefore the diction wants polish, but the effect on the immediate audience is much greater than the delivery of a speech from memory. I was petrified at your audacity in becoming an umpire.* Did you not remember the fate of Marsyas? and what an impudent adventure was that ballad in 'Punch'? I knew at once who the author was, and shuddered when I thought of the 599 stilettoes that were thirsting for your gore.

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* Along with Lord Houghton and Mr Tom Taylor, in adjudicating on the poems on Burns which competed for a prize of £50 offered by the Crystal Palace Company.

CHAPTER VIII.

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF MRS AYTOUN—ITS EFFECT ON HIM—ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATED SOCIETIES OF THE UNIVERSITY—FIRST VISIT TO HOMBURG—DYSPEPSIA AND ITS CURE—SCOTTISH COOKERY AND ITS EFFECTS—A PRESBYTERY DINNER—LIFE IN SHETLAND—LETTER TO COL. HAMLEY—DEATH OF HIS MOTHER—PUBLICATION OF NORMAN SINCLAIR—LORD LYTTON ON IT—AGAIN AT HOMBURG—SIGNS OF FAILING HEALTH—NOEL PATON'S DESIGNS FOR THE LAYS—"THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN."

It was characteristic of Aytoun that he said little of his troubles even to his most intimate friends. They were pretty sure, he thought, to have a fair share of their own, and he had schooled himself to trust for bearing his trials to his own power of self-command, and to such strength as was vouchsafed to him from a power higher than man's. His talk and his correspondence were therefore always cheerful, as in the specimens of these last which have been quoted, even when his lonely thoughts must have been filled with anxiety and doubt. For some years Mrs Aytoun had been more or less an invalid, suffering from one of those occult ailments which baffle medical skill, and which render life a long-drawn weariness. Devotedly attached as Aytoun was to her, her continuous suffering and languid health must have pressed hourly

upon his spirits. He clung to the hope expressed in the letter to his friend Robertson, last quoted, that she had begun to give signs of reviving health; but in a very few months the sad certainty came to him that this was not to be. Writing to Mr Robertson on the 6th April 1859, he says:—

Sooth to say, I am not in great spirits, for my poor dear wife has been very unwell of late, and I have been in the deepest anxiety about her.

This morning I was very nearly upset. You, my dear James, who know me, will not think what I write now a strange medley compared with the nonsense I have penned above; but she really seemed very ill, and she spoke and looked like an angel—was so sweet, kind, affectionate, and resigned, that I felt as if my heart would have burst; and the awful thought that I might soon be left alone in this world, without the companionship of one who for ten years has been dearer to me and more blessed to me than words can express, smote me with a sense of desolation. I have endeavoured not to repine. I know that God sends His chastisements in mercy, not in wrath—that what He does for us is the best; but there is an awful significance in the lines—

> "Sinful Macduff,
> Not for their own offences, but for thine,
> Fell slaughter on their souls!"

I have prayed, and in praying have received that consolation that, in the event of the worst, I hope I shall be able to bend to the rod.

The calamity foreshadowed in these most touching words was near at hand. Mrs Aytoun died on the 15th of April, and Aytoun was left a childless, lonely, and shattered man.

Shattered indeed he was. "The great calamity of life had fallen upon him," to use his own words in

the few sad lines which announced his loss to me. The doom of separation—that sombre shadow by which human love at its best and deepest is evermore haunted—had long been closely present to his imagination. "The dull, dead pain, the constant anguish of patience," wearing down her he loved, had made serious inroads on his own health. Devoted as he was, and might well be, to one who had for ten years given that sympathy and encouragement to all that was best in him, which only a wife can give, it needed not that the ties which bound him to her should have been more closely knit by the years of protracted suffering with which she had been afflicted, and which she had so meekly borne. Beautiful, bright, intellectual, gentle, the pervading yet unobtrusive influence of his life, what wonder if, when she was taken from him, he would have been well content to have been laid in the grave beside her! It is on natures like his that such bereavements fall most heavily—natures constitutionally cheerful, enjoying, and genial, but animated, under this smiling exterior, by strong feelings and warm affections, which demand an outlet in the sympathy and support of those they love. Their life is in their affections. Loved deeply, because they make those they love happy by their cheerfulness, their loyalty, and their goodness, they are of all men the most desolate when those to whom they cling are taken away, and they are left bewildered and alone. For such men life is then virtually at an end. Some, and they the happiest, die; others live on, the phantoms of their former

selves. They even seem, in Schiller's phrase, to grieve down their sorrow—

"Denn was verschmerzet nicht der Mensch?"

They take up the broken threads of life, and strive to reunite them. But the colours are faded, the outline hopelessly blurred. To them the present is a dream, the past and the hereafter the only realities. They mix with the world, and do what is left for them to do with patient courage. The old humour will flash out upon occasion bright and vivid, but its light is fitful, as though it pierced through a cloud of tears; and we see by them how truly Wordsworth spoke, when he said that

"Often glad no more,
We wear a face of joy, because
We have been sad before."

Aytoun was too sincere a Christian to do otherwise than bow meekly before the bitter bereavement which had befallen him. He faced his sorrow manfully, wrestling with it, as true men wrestle with such sorrow, in the silence of his own heart. His sisters offered that one of them should come to live with him, but well as he loved them, he would not hear of this. He would not let her leave his aged mother, and said he must take to his work again. He did so, and worked hard. But although he confessed he could not bear to hear his own footfall in his great empty house, it was long before he could be weaned from his loneliness, even by his most trusted friends. "Night after night," says Mr John Blackwood, "I used to call in upon him,

and anything more melancholy than our old bright companion, sitting with his head leaning on his hands, cheerless and helpless, I never saw." It was thus I found him one night I paid him an unexpected visit some time after Mrs Aytoun's death. He was no longer the same man, and it seemed from his looks as if in a few months he had passed through years of suffering and illness.

By degrees he rallied, and threw himself actively as before into the questions of the day. With intimate friends his talk and correspondence gradually regained its former playfulness and unreserve. But his relish for general society was gone; and, to make himself agreeable when in it, which had formerly been so easy, seemed to cost him a serious effort. The truth was, his health had been seriously shaken, and the desire of solitude and quiet was only one among many symptoms of this. Of these one of the most significant was an extreme sensitiveness to "the seasons' difference," to which he had hitherto been a comparative stranger—a sensitiveness particularly unfortunate for him, compelled as he was to live in the severe climate of Edinburgh in the winter months.

At the end of 1860 he was elected honorary president of the Associated Societies of the University of Edinburgh, an office of honour which has not been thought unworthy of acceptance by such men as Lord Brougham, Mr Gladstone, Lord Lytton, Sir David Brewster, and Mr Carlyle. This honour coming, as it

did, unsolicited, and implying a recognition of his position as one of eminence in the world of letters, was most gratifying to Aytoun. It would have been more so, but for the fact that it involved a victory over his friend Thackeray, who had been named in opposition as president for that year. He alludes to this in the following letter to his friend Mr Robertson:—

28th December 1860.

We are in the midst of an Arctic winter.

> "My young remembrance cannot parallel
> A fellow to it."

The streets almost blockaded with snow; the thermometer sometimes below zero; no water to be had, as all the pipes are frozen; and the very gas going out with a sulky stink, like the glassy eyes of an expiring skunk. I have been suffering somewhat from rheums, but am now much better, and occasionally taking my place at good men's feasts, of which there is a superabundance. But before sitting down to gossip, let us attend to business. . . . And now, business being disposed of, let us become egotistical and havering. I was certainly gratified by the University Societies' poll, because, though the honour of the presidency was not one that I would have solicited, I should not like to have been beaten on Scottish ground by Thackeray, or any other literary man ranking nearly as my contemporary. The thing itself is a bore, for it will entail the composition of a regular oration, and the publishing thereof; and I am one of those unexcitable souls who would much prefer being allowed to smoke their unoffending calumet in peace by their own hearth to haranguing crowded audiences. I have little of the passion for applause which was strongly developed in my father-in-law Christopher North. I can subsist quite comfortably without it, for which I claim no manner of merit; for, being conscious that I am only a clever kind of cuddy (*Anglicè*, donkey), I like to chew my native thistle in quietude, and without observation.

Now, good night. I reciprocate your kind wishes; and may God's blessing rest upon you and yours!

Aytoun found his health so seriously affected, that he resolved, in the course of the summer of 1861, to try a course of the waters of Homburg. Dyspepsia in its worst form had seized him. He could neither eat nor drink with comfort. Refreshing sleep was a stranger to his pillow, and exertion of every kind, bodily or mental, had become a burden. The curative properties of the Elizabethen Brunnen—still more, perhaps, entire change of scene, with the fine air and prevailing cheerfulness of the place—dispelled many of his most painful symptoms, and he returned home with health and spirits to which he had been long a stranger. His first impulse seems to have been to direct others to the remedy from which he had himself found so much relief; and with this view he wrote for 'Blackwood's Magazine' two papers, called "Meditations on Dyspepsia," the first treating of "the malady," the second of "the cure."

The malady could scarcely be more powerfully depicted than it has been by Aytoun, writing, as he manifestly did, out of the agonies of his own experience of a state, in which "a mutton-chop becomes a fiery crab, rending the interior with its claws; and even rice-pudding has the intolerable effrontery to become revivified as a hedgehog." The many causes which lead to this state of suffering are discussed as pleasantly as such things can be,—late hours, bad air, neglect of exercise, too much brain-work—excess, in short, of any

kind. But all his force of description and sarcasm is levelled at our utter neglect, as a nation, of the art of cookery,—a neglect which, while it makes the dinner-tables of most of our homes a source of constant irritation, and the viands of nearly all our inns and hotels an object of absolute terror, is the more intolerable, as no nation in the world has in its kitchens such admirable materials for food, both varied and wholesome. Scotland, as most within Aytoun's observation, comes in for some especially hard hitting. But what he says of Scotland is in the main true of the rest of the kingdom, and has not grown less so, since landlords and landladies have become a race all but extinct, and travellers are left to get what they can out of the impersonal indifference of a Company (Limited). Why are holiday rambles in this country so rare as they are? It is not curiosity or love of travel which carries nine-tenths of our tourists abroad, but simply the impossibility of finding decent comfort and moderate charges at home. Were our innkeepers not as short-sighted as they are grasping, the greater part of the money which now finds its way into the pockets of their rivals in Germany and Switzerland would pass into their own, and the British might become familiar with the finest scenery of their islands, without the certainty of having to pay exorbitantly for being made thoroughly miserable.

Go to a country inn [Aytoun writes], either in the Lowlands or the Highlands, and the odds are that they set before you such a dinner as even Ugolino in the extremity of his famine would

have hesitated to attack. Fish, by some singular dispensation of Providence, is never to be had, especially at the seaports, except during the salmon and herring season, when you can get nothing else, and your gorge rises at the repetition. If you are so far left to yourself as to order a beefsteak, be sure that it will prove as tough as the bullhide on the shield of Ajax. The mutton that is served up to you at five, formed this morning part of the corporation of a highly respectable ram, who took his last nibble of the clover just as you were stepping into the boat after breakfast. It was not the early carol of the lark, but the death-skraigh of those wretched anatomies of chickens, that roused you from your morning slumbers. But we shall not continue the picture, charged as it is with horrors. Where the absolute means are wanting, no one would be so unreasonable as to cavil at scanty fare; but in a country where the supplies are abundant, such miserable preparation, or rather lack of it, is wholly inexcusable, and more than justifies the taunts which, even now, are launched against Scottish entertainment. Great as has been the national progress in many material respects during the last fifty or sixty years, we question if the condition of the country inns is one whit better now than it was when Samuel Johnson made his famous pilgrimage. Worse cookery, we venture to say, is to be found nowhere in Europe; and we speak after a tolerably long and wide cosmopolitan experience. There is not an *auberge* or *gasthaus* in the most sequestered districts of France or Germany in which you will not be far better served than in a Scottish inn of much loftier pretensions—not because their supply is better, or indeed nearly so good, but because the foreign women know how to cook, and take a pride and pleasure in their vocation. English wayside cooking has, no doubt, its assailable points, but for comfort and cleanliness commend us to an English inn. The choice may not be great, but what is produced is almost always perfect of its kind. The bread, the butter, the home-brewed, the eggs, and the bacon, would of themselves constitute a banquet that might have pleased the palate of Apicius; and all are set down with a neatness and taste that absolutely gives a fillip to the appetite; whereas, with us, there is scarcely a perceptible zone between luxury and

absolute sordidness. These are harsh words, but will any one venture to impugn them? Let us see. We are writing these lines in Edinburgh, a city of luxury, wherein, at a hundred houses of common resort, you may command the best entertainment. For culinary excellence and refinement, we are proud to say that it is not surpassed by any capital in Europe. But pass beyond its environs—go out some six or seven miles into the country, for a drive, or for the inspection of any of the scenes rendered classical by the muse or by the relics of the olden time—order dinner to be prepared at the inn where your horses must necessarily be baited—and, our life for yours, the result will be that you never will renew the experiment. There is not far from this city one of the most perfectly exquisite specimens of medieval art in the form of a chapel that anywhere exists. It is situated in the midst of scenery of surpassing beauty, and a long summer's day would scarce serve to weary the enthusiastic tourist. No stranger coming to Scotland, at any period of the year, departs without having visited it. A commodious hotel there might make the fortune of the proprietor; whereas, as matters are now arranged, you could hardly be more indifferently victualled at Leadburn or the Kirk of Shotts.

We write feelingly, because we have recently endured some hours of excruciating agony in consequence of having incautiously accepted an invitation to assist at a Presbytery dinner. A more agreeable set of men than were assembled on that occasion you could hardly hope to meet with; but had the mistress of the inn been the mother of four unplaced probationers, she could not have exerted herself more strenuously to make vacancies throughout the bounds. Over the enormity of that woman's cookery we shall charitably throw a veil; nor do more than chronicle our disgust at finding the following notice appended to a detailed report of the proceedings in a local newspaper: "The dinner was supplied by Mrs M'Pushion in her usual style of excellence, and appeared to give universal satisfaction." Universal satisfaction! Why, a South Sea Islander would have turned from the ghastly banquet with abhorrence; and the famous Celtic caddy (*Anglicè*, street porter) who felt no inconvenience from swallowing a dram of aquafortis, would have sputtered like a

wild-cat had he tasted the abominable fluids that were circulated in the dirty decanters.

Let no man, therefore, however sound may be his digestion, flatter himself that he can pass through life without occasionally experiencing symptoms akin to dyspepsia. The modes of poisoning are manifold; and twelve bad meals taken in succession may cut short your career as effectually as a dose of arsenic. Men are not at all times "masters of their fate." Eating is an absolute necessity; but you cannot always control the quality of the food. We have been shut up for a whole week in a lodging-house, subsisting upon rations far less wholesome than those served out to the convicts in a jail, and the consequence has been an attack of acidity that has made us wretched for a month. It is easy to suggest that a man placed in such circumstances might prolong existence by confining himself to bread, butter, and cheese. The idea is plausible; but how if the bread is sour, the butter rancid, and the cheese like gutta percha? But, you will say, how is it that, if the diet be so bad, the natives do not suffer? Don't they? Inquire after their health, and you will find that four out of five are afflicted with stomachic torments. Go into the shop in a small town where drugs are vended along with stay-laces, Birmingham jewellery, and cheap railway novels, and you will find on the counter half-a-dozen different kinds of pills warranted to be specific for dyspepsia. Bushels of these are annually swallowed by people who ought to enjoy the very best of health, and would do so, were they only to regulate their diet, improve their style of cookery, and occasionally open their windows; and as for the carbonates, they are consumed in the provinces by the ton. The labouring classes escape because their diet is remarkably simple. Porridge disagrees with no one, and sowens are certainly salutary. But sour bread, tough mutton, dough dumplings, and tea like a decoction of senna, carry woe and pain to the interior of many a tradesman who piques himself on his gentility for maintaining a drudge to do the whole domestic work, cooking included, for a stipend of thirty shillings by the year.—"Meditations on Dyspepsia, No. II." 'Blackwood's Magazine,' October 1861.

The following letter, which accompanied the MS. of the article just cited, tells of suffering from such food and lodging as Aytoun has here described, which might have driven an anchorite to despair:—

LERWICK, 18*th August* 1861.

MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,—This is as beastly a day of wind and rain as ever old Norna stirred up in these desolate islands; and instead of dining at a house a mile or two off, where I might have reckoned confidently upon hotch-potch, I am forced to abide the provisions of my landlady, which is a sore trial for a dyspeptic patient just taken from the luxuries of the Kursaal. However, I *can* eat now, and that is a mighty comfort. I have sent off, under a separate cover, to George Street, the remainder of "Meditations on Dyspepsia," which I hope you will like. What is going on in the habitable globe I know not, for my newspapers are, I conjecture, in a parcel at the steamboat office, and the people here (out of sheer laziness) adhere so closely to the doctrines of Calvin—may his name be accursed!—that they won't give out anything till Monday. So, *faute de mieux*, I am writing you this, and when I finish I shall—— But I hear the clattering of a dish-cover. Pause we a while!

. . . . . .

I knew it. Shade of Sefton, what an apology for a meal! Mucilage of rice, with pony cartilage, and not a drop of wine, beer, or brandy to be had for love or money!

It is still blowing great guns, but I trust the Eagle of the North will have folded his wings within four-and-twenty hours, so that I may get off to-morrow evening to comparatively well-victualled Orkney. Even in that insular Goshen it is not my intention to stay beyond a fortnight, and I hope very soon after to have the pleasure of taking you by the hand.

I tried the fishing one day in the Loch of Tingwall, but the trouts would not rise; and, I suspect, from something I have heard, that there are few grouse in Orkney.

Adios! I love you too well to wish you to be here, even for a single hour, in such miserable weather as this.

The good effects of his sojourn at Homburg are visible in the cheerfulness of the tone which begins to appear again in his correspondence, as in the following pleasant letter to Colonel Hamley:—

EDINBURGH, 16 GREAT STUART STREET,
3d October 1861.

MY DEAR HAMLEY,—I thank you for your kind and most facetious letter of remembrance. The best proof of the efficacy of the Homburg waters is, that I have just returned from a fortnight's sojourn at Strathtyrum with unimpaired appetite and digestion; but I have grown cautious in mine old age, and consort with Bacchus on terms of greater formality than heretofore. Those dyspeptic papers, I apprehend, are likely to lead me into trouble. I have just despatched an answer to a most dolorous letter from a victim residing at Portsea, who craves information about the waters; and if every fellow who is cropsick takes it into his head to apply to me, I shall be obliged, in self-defence, to take out a medical licence, and charge them roundly for advice. You are wrong, though, in your suspicion that I aggravated the horrors of the disease. I was, I assure you, very ill, and as thin as a whipping-post before I set out for Germany, and not one of the doctors here could do me any good. I feel much better now than I have done any time these three years, and I pray God to keep me so, for I have just had a terrible reminder of the frail tenure of our existence. On Saturday last Lord Eglinton dined at Strathtyrum in the full flow of health and spirits. On Sunday I walked with him on the links, when he expatiated upon the excellent effects of hard exercise at golf. On Tuesday he overexerted himself at that game, dined out, and was struck down in the course of the evening by apoplexy. By the accounts received to-day, his recovery is quite hopeless; and so there is an end of the noblest and finest character that I ever happened to encounter—a man of the heroic stamp of Montrose and Dundee!

Your notion about going to Homburg next year delights me. If alive, I shall assuredly be there; indeed, they say two courses are requisite for perfect renovation, and it is a capital place for

fun. I have picked up a good many hints from the queer society there, which I intend, some day or other, to work out; and I have a capital notion in my head which, I trust, will take proper shape ere long. It would just suit you, and you may have it for £20, if you will remit me half Bank of England notes, as some incomprehensible ninnyhammers are in the habit of doing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is a virgin notion, and warranted good for at least a pair of sheets.

By the way, curiously enough, it so happened that Blackwood showed me the proof-sheets of 'Capt. Clutterbuck,' without telling me the name of the writer. I returned them with a eulogistic opinion, and the remark that, though I was satisfied Hamley was not the author, it bore such an affinity to his style that I could not get him out of my head. Rather curious that, isn't it, as an instance of family idiosyncrasy?* To you I have been often indebted for eleemosynary *kudos*, your articles, erroneously attributed to me, having sustained my sinking fame; but you are too much of a gentleman to make any difference on that account, as to the transmission of the aforesaid £20. By Pandarus of Troy, the notion I offer you on such easy terms is the very Light of the Harem, the Zuleika of my mental Seraglio! Down with the dust, and I send her blushing to your expectant arms.

My sporting this year has been an entire failure; but I am going to-morrow where pheasants most do congregate, and I expect to do something. I am not very fond, however, of those swell houses, where you are sure to be pestered with earls and that sort of people; for I cleave to the doctrine of honest Morgan Odoherty, that the Pope and the pot are the emblems of social freedom. You get through the forenoon well enough, and the grub is always unexceptionable; but when, in the course of the evening, the question is put—"Would Professor Aytoun be kind enough to read us one of his ballads?" I feel as riled as a gorilla, and wish to heaven that I was harlequin, so that I might with impunity take a flying leap through the window. But perhaps these annoyances occur in all grades of society. I remember being in a farmhouse with a distinguished friend, whose narra-

* 'Captain Clutterbuck,' an excellent tale of West India life, which appeared in 'Blackwood,' and has since been republished, was written by Colonel Hamley, R.E., elder brother of Aytoun's correspondent.

tive of bloodthirsty single combats with Todleben and Gortschakoff were interrupted by an exclamation of, "Eh, Cornal! was ye no feared?" which somewhat discomposed the equanimity of the exterminating warrior. As for fishing, it is a positive fact that I have not killed a single trout this year, a thing unexampled since I first cast a line into the waters. The weather when I was in Orkney, was simply damnable. I left Homburg on the 1st of August, where the pomegranates and oleanders were making the air fragrant; and the week thereafter I was at Lerwick in Zetland, where the prominent stench was that of boiled whale, and Æolus was amusing himself by blowing out the contents of his very filthiest bags.

In another letter to the same friend he makes a remark which has lost none of its force by the lapse of time.

"What a mess," he says, "politics are in! It is a very hard thing that we cannot form a ministry without having in it several Jonahs. Now, I don't object to *one* Jonah, because it may be convenient to have a fellow ready to pitch overboard on extraordinary emergency; but if half the crew are Jonahs, it strikes me that the operation of getting rid of them is very much like walking the plank." As a specimen of the kind of humour with which his conversation abounded, the same friend furnishes the following anecdote:—"On my appointment as professor of the military art at the Staff College, he advised me, amongst other facetious recommendations, to lecture in a suit of armour of the twelfth century, which, besides its appropriateness to my office, would have this advantage—that when at a loss for a word or an argument, I could let

down the vizor, and allow my voice to be lost in the hollow of the helmet."

On the 7th November 1861 Aytoun's mother died, at the age of ninety. Her end was like her life, calm and saintly. Had this loss come some years before, it would have fallen upon him heavily indeed. But to that better land to which she was removed had already gone one who was still dearer to him, and in such circumstances we seem to part with less reluctance even with the dearest of those that are left. Besides, falling as she did "like ripe fruit seasonably gathered," the natural grief for her loss could have in it as little of bitterness as might well be. In reply to the letter I had written to him on hearing of her death, he wrote to me as follows:—

EDINBURGH, *November* 21, 1861.

MY DEAR MARTIN,—I am much obliged for your very kind letter. The loss which my sisters and I have sustained is heavy, because irreparable; and they, having devoted themselves to one another for the last ten years, feel the change most acutely. Still we have much to be thankful for. Her life was extended far beyond the usual period, with no decay of her mental faculties, and little diminution of her bodily strength; and her end was most calm and peaceful.

I was much the better for my trip to Homburg. I hoped to have seen you in London on my way there in June; but as I really had no business in the metropolis, I wanted to be put to rights as speedily as possible. I avoided the Wen, and took the steamer from Hull to Rotterdam. I hope, if all goes well, to renew my visit to Homburg next year.

I am again at work for the winter with a large class (about 140), which gives me some occupation, and I have taken to it this year more kindly than usual. I am revising the last sheets of 'Norman Sinclair,' and I suppose it will be out in

the course of ten days. I know there are some good things in it, but it has also many faults, and I cannot help seeing that it hangs fire in the second volume. The truth is, that when composing that part I was dreadfully hipped—leading a lonely uncomfortable life in Orkney, beset with the dreariest weather, a combination which forced down to the lowest point my intellectual barometer. However, I have learned by practice a thing or two; and if ever I should be tempted to try my hand at another novel, I feel persuaded that I shall be able to produce something better. But I have for the present no scheme in view.

I congratulate you on the success of your Catullus. . . . You and I differ, however, in our estimate of the value of the original; for, with the exception of some half-dozen pieces at the utmost, I do not think the poems of Catullus deserving of the pains you have bestowed upon them. The wit of these Romans (of course I exclude Horace) always appeared to me flat and meagre. I recollect perfectly my amazement when a boy at hearing a worthy pedagogue declare that there was nothing in the whole range of literature so delectably funny as the notion of a purse full of spinners, and the ointment which was to make Fabullus wish that he was nothing but a nose. I could not for the life of me conjure up a grin; on which account I was pronounced by Dominie Sampson to be an incorrigible blockhead, with no sense of the humorous in my composition. But the Epithalamium, the Nuptials, and the Atys are splendid.* . . . .

'Norman Sinclair,' which appeared in 'Blackwood,' month by month, between January 1860 and August

* So splendid that if Catullus had written nothing else he must always hold a foremost place among poets. To humour he has no pretension; and Aytoun's Dominie Sampson must have been the veriest pedant. But Aytoun himself, here and in our many conversations on the subject, scarcely did justice to the power of clothing deep feeling in exquisite language, and to the subtle pervading grace of style, which distinguish Catullus in a great number of his lighter pieces.

1861, was begun by Aytoun soon after his wife's death. He had entered upon it apparently without any definite plan, and it is therefore less a novel, in the strict sense of the word, than a series of sketches somewhat loosely strung together upon the thread of the hero's life. Aytoun had unwisely begun to publish it in the Magazine before it was completed, and thus deprived himself of the opportunity of remedying this defect, by cutting away a good deal which, however excellent in itself, might have been omitted with advantage to the general effect. This book has been talked of by certain critics as a "dreary failure." The remark is, however, most unjust. There are in it many passages of great beauty and vigour, and episodes of the richest humour. Its chief fault is, that Aytoun has tried to put too much into it. Had he marked out his story in clearer lines, and studied greater brevity in detail, the book would not only have been a most readable one, which it is, but also a publisher's success, which it was not. In contrast with the sweeping condemnation to which I have referred, it is agreeable to turn to the discriminating and genial criticism of Lord Lytton, conveyed in the following letter:—

VENTNOR, *January* 6, 1862.

MY DEAR AYTOUN,—I have just read your new book, and thank you for it most cordially. It is full of fresh and vigorous writing, and brings an original mind into the hackneyed forms of the novel.

Perhaps, if an old hand in the art might presume to offer suggestions, you might in future works of this kind find an

advantage in deciding more resolutely between the questions of Plot and No Plot. I think that if, on the one hand, you discarded story altogether, and gave the freest swing to your powers of humour, fancy, and observation through one or two elaborated characters, like Sterne in 'Tristram Shandy,' or through playful philosophical monologue, like Le Maitre or Töppfer, you might make a delightful work of high character. On the other hand, if you resolved to seek interest in the movements of passion through the creatures and construction of fable, you might find it advisable to give to your tale a more determinate backbone than there is in 'Norman Sinclair.' You have therein ample materials for plot and for character, but might probably have improved them by more premeditated arrangement. In that case characters like Benton, Lumley, Smoothly, would have been finished off more minutely, and all the incidents of the story been grouped around them. At present I think the most finished character is Buchanan; and if I had invented him I should have kept him on to the last. You kill him off at the beginning. For a story, too, *petticoat interest* is required to a greater extent than you admit it.

Pardon these hasty but friendly sentences, which are, after all, not worth much, because you achieve an interest in defiance of rules. I did not lay down your book, once begun, till it was finished, though I had pressing work on my hands. The freshness and play of your style kept my mind to your page, and that is the true note of the novelist, who must in all else strike out his own path for himself.—With best wishes for the season, yours truly,

E. B. LYTTON.

Whatever you do in this way in future, consider that humour is at your disposal, and the rules of humour are inexhaustible; but they require arrangement for full display.

The benefit which he had received from the Homburg waters decided Aytoun to resort to them again in the summer of 1862. Here I found him in the August of that year. He had been drinking the waters

for about six weeks, and told me he felt greatly set up in health. But there were few outward signs of this: he had grown much thinner; there was a hectic flush in his cheek; his face had lost its bright expression; and a beard which he had grown, and which he ever afterwards wore, had lengthened the lines of his face in a way which increased the appearance of feeble health. It concealed, too, the fine curve of his lower jaw, and the characteristic play of the muscles around his mouth, in which the expression of his face chiefly lay. These, and its other best features, have been most happily preserved in the bust by Mr Patric Park, which shows him at "his best and fullest," from which the frontispiece to this volume has been engraved. The languor of feeble health still hung about him. Flashes of the old bright humour broke through it upon occasion, but never in that rich unintermitted stream with which I had been in former days so familiar. He was no longer equal to walks of mile on mile which we used to enjoy together but a few years before. A midday saunter in the shade of the fine beech woods on the slopes opposite to the town; an afternoon stroll to the garden of the Princess Elizabeth, or to the terrace of the Schloss to see the sun set behind the Taunus range —and there are few more picturesque sights anywhere —was as much as he could accomplish without fatigue. These he enjoyed intensely, for the love of nature, always strong in him, had deepened with time, and the sweet freshness of the landscape around Homburg seems more sweet and fresh by contrast with the fever-

ish life and tainted moral atmosphere of the town itself. Aytoun was deeply interested in the state of Germany, foreseeing the imminent approach of a great convulsion there, but anticipating, as little as any other publicist, the solution of the problem which has recently taken Europe by surprise. He was then engaged on a paper on "Germany and her Prospects," which appeared in 'Blackwood' for October 1862. He had also written, under the exhilarating influence of the place, an animated paper on "The Rights of Women," and another, not less amusing, on "Watering Places." The former he sent to Mr Blackwood, with the following letter. The drawing by Mr Noel Paton, to which it refers, is one that had been designed for the illustrated edition of the 'Lays of the Cavaliers,' which had been for some time in preparation.

HOMBURG, *July* 14, 1862.

MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,— . . . I quite agree with you about Noel Paton's drawing. It is not only ghastly, but it appears to me (which is a matter of importance to an artist) that it is æsthetically wrong. Ghosts are not skeletons, nor are they ever so portrayed. If, in the tragedy of 'Macbeth,' a skeleton were to walk on instead of the image of the murdered Banquo, the whole interest would disappear. A skeleton, in the view of Albert Durer, the old masters, and the old poets, typifies "Death," not the apparition of a man who has been slain. A skeleton was indeed technically called "A Death," as in the account of the hideous figure that appeared in the dance at Holyrood, on the occasion of the nuptials of our last King Alexander. And such were the veiled figures that were supposed to flit through towns infected by the plague. The idea of skeleton ghosts was, I think, first started by Bürger and Mat. Lewis, and is a poor conception, since it is hardly possible to distinguish one skeleton from an-

other, and *nobody ever saw his own.* I hope Noel Paton will seriously consider this, for even in allegorical design there should be an observance of propriety; and I am quite sure that this drawing of his (masterly in execution as is everything from his pencil) would be objected to as in doubtful taste. I don't like to presume so far as to offer a suggestion, but it seems to me that if the head were left, and, instead of the skeletons, two veiled female figures were introduced, with averted faces, and hands clasped and raised to heaven, the sentiment would be more effectually expressed.

I have little to tell you, except that I am keeping well, and deriving, I think, much benefit from the waters. . . . I have not been altogether idle. Though the dull weather has been rather against work, I have nearly finished an article on the "Rights of Women," taking my text from the demand made at the Social Science Meeting, that the professions should be opened to the fair sex. I think you will like it, for it seems to me rollicking and lively. . . . I don't contemplate leaving Homburg for three weeks to come. I like it—that is, in good weather; and the air and water suit me. Anyhow it is infinitely preferable to Edinburgh, and I can work quite as freely here as elsewhere.

As might be expected, the "Rights of Women" was a theme in which Aytoun found abundant scope for the indulgence of humorous suggestions as to what must ensue if women were to become lawyers, doctors, and legislators. For example, he says:—

Have you ever reflected upon the probable consequences of turning loose some thirty or forty fascinating damsels, tricked out like Portia in the 'Merchant of Venice,' among a swarm of young barristers, not yet so versed in the language of the law as to have forgotten the more agreeable jargon which is spoken in the courts of Cupid? Can there be the slightest doubt that before the first fortnight was over, there would be open and shameless gallopading in Westminster Hall, and the Parliament House of Edinburgh. Then what bolting in and out of libraries and robing-rooms—what infinite giggling in corridors—what sky-

larking in the box of the reporters! Moreover, as each Portia will of course be attended by a pert Nerissa of a clerk, ample provision will be made, even within the walls of the temple of Themis, for the prosecution of the amours of Messrs Chuckster and M'Crowdy, who are severally regarded by their associates as the most irresistible young men that ever carried a brief-bag or fastened up a process with a strap!

Again:—

On the whole, we regard this movement on the part of the ladies as one purely spasmodic, and not likely to lead to any practical result. Their plea seems to us to be grounded on the notion of the equality of the sexes. Once admit that, and every sort of restriction becomes a palpable injustice. If women may be lawyers and physicians, why may they not also be lawgivers and members of the Cabinet? Why not have a female Chancellor as keeper of her Majesty's conscience—a lady Speaker of the House of Commons—or a Home Secretary in petticoats? Would it be fair to restrict the career of women to the Bar, and deny them promotion to the Bench? Why are peeresses in their own right prevented from sitting and voting in the House of Lords? Is it impossible to find a dowager who might be Archbishop of Canterbury, or a female representative of Jenny Geddes to officiate as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland? These become very serious questions, if entire equality be conceded; if it is denied, where is the line of demarcation to be drawn? We apprehend the real solution to be this,—that society, which is now very ancient, has from experience formed a code of laws for its own regulation, from which it would be highly inexpedient to deviate—that by the common consent of mankind in all ages, certain vocations have been assigned to each of the sexes, as their proper and legitimate sphere of action and utility—and that any attempted readjustment of these could lead to nothing save hopeless error and confusion. That was an admirable satire of the Greek who depicted Hercules with the distaff of Omphale in his hand, but gave the club and lion's hide to the custody of the fragile woman! Surely in his day, as in our own, there must have been some vehement assertion of female rights

and equality, and the dexterous Athenian hit upon this delicate method of exposing its utter absurdity!

The passage which, however, has most of the qualities of his earlier papers, is the following:—

Let man and woman work according to their kind and capacity, and the result is sure to be satisfactory. Break that rule, from whatsoever cause or motive, and you will find not only that the work is ill performed, but that nature protests against the infringement of her primary laws.

That there have been such infringements, no one will be hardy enough to deny. Caprice, fashion, cupidity, and in some instances necessity, have each and all combined to obliterate or render doubtful the true line of demarcation, and to make men effeminate and women masculine by tempting them to unsuitable occupations. Take, for example, the trade of tailoring. Most assuredly the instincts of nature direct that everything connected with the shaping, sewing, and construction of garments should be exclusively intrusted to women. The man finds the raw material; the woman prepares it for use. The Red Indian goes forth with his weapons to hunt the buffalo on the prairie; the squaw remains in the wigwam, fashioning the robes and decorating the moccasins of her lord. And nature does not change. The small white hands we so much admire were expressly formed for stitching—the large sinewy fist of the male was intended for other employment. But, as society became more and more artificial and complex in its arrangements, men began to trench upon the just prerogative of females. Dwarfs, lameters, and rickety creatures, who were physically unfitted for the performance of robust labour, took to tailoring as the easiest means within their reach of earning their daily bread. Hard-toiling housewives, who found they had enough to do in washing, baking, cooking, dairywork, and mending the duds of the bairns, did not object to the innovation, but charitably allowed poor feckless Johnnie, the widow's son—who, God help him! was fit for nothing else—to sit all day long by the fire, shaping and sewing the gudeman's Sunday coat and breeches—gave him his daily allowance of porridge and kail,

and finally forwarded him to the nearest hallan, with a couple of lily-white shillings for his fee. But in process of time it occurred to certain lazy loons, whose proper place was between the stilts of the plough, that it must be infinitely more comfortable to snook, like Johnnie, in the chimney-corner, within hearing of the simmering pot, than to trudge all day through wet clay land in the very worst of weather, and afterwards to fodder-up the horses, before slinking off to the tasteless fare and miserable blankets of the bothy. And so, even in country districts, did tailors multiply and increase; while in cities they became as numerous as grasshoppers in a midsummer meadow.

But mark how nature punishes such poor and pitiful effeminacy! Yonder attenuated being with the haggard eyes, hectic spot upon the cheek, and perpetual hacking cough—whose legs, utterly devoid of calf, are not thicker than the handle of a flail—is an operative tailor who, had he followed his original calling, would have been a hilarious shepherd on the mountains. Not in the stifling close nor in the reeking wynd was Ephraim Sherar born; but in a cottage far away in the heart of the pleasant Ochils, by the banks of a wimpling burn, and under the shade of three stately ash-trees that were tall and strong ere M'Intosh of Borlum led his men across the Firth of Forth, to perish in the fight at Preston. And Ephraim had heard in spring the bleating of the lambs on the hillside, the ceaseless call of the cuckoo from the thickets, and the wail of the solitary plover—he had felt the fragrance of the white honey-clover clustered on the lea, and had watched the sun go down in magnificence behind the purple mountains of the west; but these things had no charm for Ephraim. He was not only ambitious, but sensual. Fired by the rumour of the high wages and illicit joys that might be obtained in the city, he longed to join that distinguished corps which Glasgow boasts of as her "chappies," and to quaff the magic potion proffered by the Circes of the Trongate. The prayers of his parents prevailed not. In an evil hour he left the towers of Stirling behind him; and plunged, with the recklessness of an Empedocles, into the sulphurous mists of the Cowcaddens. Not ours to trace the particulars of that wretched career, which finally left him the denizen of a squalid garret, just able,

through precarious slopwork, to earn so much as would purchase a small modicum of bread and cabbage, and a disproportionate allowance of the vilest adulterated whisky. Ephraim, who might have been the pride of the peasantry, now ranks among the lowest of the dungs! Yet is he, in his own estimation, no unimportant member of society. He is perhaps the most fluent orator of the "Operative Club," established for the purpose of counteracting the baneful effects of capital and competition; and not unfrequently does he assure the policeman, who good-naturedly plucks him from the gutter out of which he has scarce strength to struggle, that—

"The rank is but the guinea stamp—
A man's a man for a' that!"

Robert Burns! when you penned that verse, you meant it as a consolation for the humble brave. Alas! alas! it has been made the watchword of a myriad of sots! Seldom have we heard the words issue from the mouths of any save the drunken and the profane; for the honest industrious man is conscious of his own worth, knows that the same laws are applicable to the rich and the poor, strives to do his duty in that station in which Providence has been pleased to place him, and envies not the luxuries habitual to those from whose employment he derives his living.

CHAPTER IX.

LECTURE AT ULBSTER HALL ON BALLAD POETRY—SIR WALTER SCOTT EMPHATICALLY THE MINSTREL—ON THE CAUSES OF SCOTT'S POPULARITY—DISTINCTION BETWEEN POET AND MINSTREL—A NEW CHAPTER FROM IVANHOE—ODE ON THE MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCE OF WALES—HIS FAILING HEALTH—SECOND MARRIAGE—VARYING STATE OF HIS HEALTH—LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH—HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE—HIS POWER AS A HUMORIST—HIS CHARACTER.

AYTOUN'S popularity in Edinburgh drew upon him frequent requests to minister to the prevailing taste for lectures on literary topics; and, little as he liked such displays, he was too good-natured to refuse them. Among his papers I find the following fragment of one of these popular discourses, which seems to have been delivered about this time at Ulbster Hall to a comparatively private audience, and which is interesting as expressing the enthusiastic admiration which he felt for Sir Walter Scott, as well as for the very happy imitation of his manner with which it concludes :—

BALLAD POETRY OF MODERN EUROPE.

It was not without justice that his admiring and grateful countrymen conferred upon Sir Walter Scott the appellation of the mighty minstrel of his time in preference to all his contemporaries. Some have been regarded by competent judges as more skilled than he was in the arts of poetry, as having a

greater power of language, a more varied range of illustration, a better knowledge of the subtleties of verse, numbers more polished, and imagery more dazzling than were displayed by the author of the 'Lay of the Last Ministrel,' and of 'Marmion.' The moody power of Byron; the refined taste of Campbell; the highly imaginative and spiritual conceptions of Coleridge, which sound to us as if the breathings of the Æolian harp had, by some strange magic, been arrested in middle air; the utterances of Shelley, wild, inarticulate, yet withal musical as the wailings of Ariel when imprisoned in the heart of the knotted oak; the Oriental glow and prodigal luxuriance of Southey, as exhibited in that one masterpiece of his genius, the "Thalaba," a poem which of itself is rich enough to have redeemed the poverty of an age; the Venetian voluptuousness of colouring which is the characteristic of Keats; the occasional felicity which Wordsworth displayed in accommodating internal moods of thought to the aspect of external nature; the singular faculty which Wilson possessed of painting as it were through vapour, and with the half-dissolved colours of the iris,—all these have been dwelt upon, lauded, and held up by critics for our admiration, and to all of them has admiration been accorded; and yet to none of these poets, great and famous as they are, has the name of minstrel been given. And why? Because in the popular judgment—which is usually right in its decisions, perhaps the more so because it is instinctive and does not parade its reasons—these poets addressed themselves to audiences not only of superior cultivated taste, but of peculiar idiosyncrasies. They could, each of them, charm a circle of greater or of less dimensions. They were magnetic in a high degree, not to all minds, but to minds similarly constituted with their own. They were masters of a spell, not unfelt perhaps by all who heard them, but potent only as regarded those to whom they stood in close intellectual affinity. They were potentates of the realm of poetry, as were the members of the old Germanic diet—Counts, Landgraves, Markgraves, Dukes, Princes, Electors—but the voice of none of them was acknowledged as paramount throughout all the land. The peculiar grandeur of Scott is, that he is so acknowledged. From the Queen on the throne to the humblest

peasant in Scotland—and my remark goes no further, for in his poetry Scott is almost exclusively national, and observes the boundary of the Tweed as rigidly as did our forefathers when the Wardens of the Marches were on the alert—his works are read and known; and, better than either, recited whenever enthusiasm, unable to express itself adequately, calls for poetry as its interpreter; and hence it is that to him alone, of all our modern British poets, the name of minstrel has been accorded, or at least the highest place among the minstrels who in this generation have done honour to our Scottish soil.

This popularity, which I assert to be a fact, must be accounted for on some other principle than the mere superiority in point of genius, or even of poetical accomplishment. I do not maintain, and I never have maintained, that the genius of Scott was greater than that of some of the men whose names I have already enumerated; and in regard to poetical accomplishment, under which head I would include arrangement, expression, command of language, and dexterity in the arts of ornament, several of them were more consummate adepts than he. Why then is he so popular? I will tell you. First, because he is, beyond all others of our day, the poet of action, the portrayer of deeds, the vehement narrator of life in its excited and exalted moods. The same impulse which makes us long to be spectators of a battle-field, or witnesses of some gorgeous pageant—the same impulse which drew our ancestors in crowds to the tournament or the coronation—attracts us to the poetry of Scott, in which we recognise, or think that we recognise, a vivid representation of the past. He gives us action, which we accept as historically true; he utters sentiments not languid, polished, and refined, but in accordance with the action which never for a moment flags; and we are hurried on, whether we will or no, by the tide, torrent, and impetuosity of his narrative. Look, for example, at the midnight ride of William of Deloraine from Branxholm to Melrose—the wonderful sketch of the Abbey, not elaborated to display the skill of the artist, but as it stood in the pale moonlight when the borderer was threading its aisles—the awful scene at the opening of the Wizard's tomb, when the red light of the sepulchral lamp streams upward as the stone is raised, and

discloses the form of the dead, the book of magic lying on its breast—the return of the scared freebooter dizzy with the sights and sounds of fear, even his iron nerves unstrung, until, amidst the greenwood boughs, he beholds the crest of his hereditary foeman, when, quick as thought, he couches his spear, and spurs his steed for the deadly encounter. All that, from first to last, is minstrelsy of the very highest order—minstrelsy the power of which is so absorbing that we cannot resist it—minstrelsy which man and woman, boy and greybeard, lord and vassal, prince and peasant, alike feel, appreciate, and understand—minstrelsy which fulfils all the ends which that kind of poetry can either devise or achieve. Next, I think that Scott is popular because he abstains from anatomy of the passions—because throughout the whole of his verse you have no metaphysical problems to solve, no intricate intellectual knots to unravel. His characters require no explanation. They are as clearly defined and as distinctly drawn in their weakness and their strength, in their nobleness and their baseness, in their virtues and in their frailties, as are those of Chaucer, a poet to whom, in many respects, Scott presents striking marks of resemblance. He was no Frankenstein to fashion monsters beyond the pale of God's creation. He did not, like Byron, confound the elements of right and wrong by calling into ideal being such melodramatic incongruities as the Conrads, the Laras, and the Giaours—enigmas or rather chimeras which, fortunately for us all, have no recognisable types in humanity. He did not, like Wordsworth, select some moonstruck pedlar or itinerant vendor of crazy crockery as the proper medium for the utterance of apparently profound meditations. He did not, like Shelley, practise self-anatomy, and entreat the public to assist at the vivisection of his palpitating heart. He did not idealise or refine, like Coleridge and Wilson; or make his characters palaver—for that is the proper word—as Southey was too prone to do. Scott confines himself, and confines himself rigidly, in his poetry at least, to characters of a kind intelligible to all, and he does not seek either to heighten or to depress them beyond the ordinary level. Hence, it has been said by some critics, that they are superficial or commonplace. If by that they mean to say that his characters do not present

us with a condensation of all that is great or mean, attractive or repulsive, in humanity, I agree with them in point of fact, but I differ widely in deduction. A hero beautiful as Antinous, valorous as Hector, chivalrous as Bayard, wise as Socrates, eloquent as Cicero, faithful as Pirithous, constant as Sir Tristrem, learned as Saint Augustine, abstinent as Saint Anthony, pure as Sir Galahad, generous as Saint Martin, philosophical as Plato, poetical as Orpheus, and musical as Apollo, is something (if that which is impossible can be called something) which the world has never seen, and which it probably would not endure. Shakespeare's women—and how charming they are!—have each a distinctive character; but attempt to mingle together the separate qualities and excellences which delight us so in Miranda, Beatrice, Rosalind, Imogen, Desdemona, and Juliet, and I wot not what would be the compound. You may depend upon it that the lifelike correspondence to nature of the characters of Scott, and the absence of all exaggeration in their limning, have very materially contributed to his success and extensive popularity; the more so when we keep in mind that, except in the drama, forcible delineation of character is a subordinate requisite of poetry.

Why, then, should Scott be distinctively styled "the minstrel?" Simply for this reason; that the recitation of the noblest passages of his poetry will procure, in every mixed assembly, a more vivid, marked, and general effect than could be occasioned by the recitation of the writings of any other poet of this century. In fact they are framed for recitation—that is, for oral utterance, when the mind can accompany the ear without pause or difficulty. This is a matter to which modern poets, unfortunately for themselves and for the endurance of their reputation, pay little heed. Too many of them, now that oral reading or rather reciting has fallen so much into abeyance, construct their ditties solely for the behoof of the student and solitary reader, trusting that what may not be intelligible at first will become so upon a diligent reperusal. That is very much the same as if a public speaker or a preacher were deliberately to give such an appearance of profundity or abstruseness to his discourse that the immediate audience could not comprehend it, but were com-

pelled to wait with patience for a report or imprintment of the oracular harangue. And it is a fact, and a distressing one, that many preachers do fall into this deplorable error, and adopt such a style, both of expression and illustration, that the illiterate cannot follow them. Hence the phenomena, too common in our days, of empty pews, and of ever-shifting dissent—of learning made worse than useless because it is not accompanied by simplicity; and hence also it is, that many a fair reputation, laboriously won at college, has subsequently dwindled into insignificance and contempt.

Therefore I am resolute in refusing the title of minstrel to those poets whose works will not stand the test of recitation before a mixed audience. I call no man a good writer of tragedy unless his plays are such as to attract when exhibited on the stage; but, for all that, there is much fine poetry in plays which no mixed audience would endure. In like manner there is an immense deal of good poetry which is not minstrelsy—nay, I suppose that out of the mass of recognised poets, minstrels are in a decided minority. So be it; but they have this at least in their favour, that they command the universal ear. Nor am I in the least shaken in my confidence as to the truth and accuracy of the distinction which I have endeavoured to draw, by the consideration that passages may be cited from the works of various poets, whom I do not call minstrels, which will bear the test imposed. That I believe, though not in a large measure; for the habit of artificial diction, suited only to the educated classes, or to a peculiarly educated class, is detrimental to their general reception. I would instance Dryden's ode, commonly called "Alexander's Feast." It is a very fine lyric—one of the finest, indeed, in our language—but I question whether it would be properly comprehended or appreciated by a mixed assembly. Its innate energy and sonorousness, evident if it were properly declaimed, might excite admiration, like some strains of music which are favourites from their decided character, but the meaning would be vaguely felt. On the other hand, many men eminently, nay, pre-eminently, entitled to the name of minstrels, have lost themselves altogether while attempting the artificial mode, and adopting conventional ornaments. I shall give you a

notable example of this. The following is part of an elegy written in the year 1787, on the death of Lord President Dundas:—

"Lone on the bleaky hills the straying flocks
Shun the fierce storms among the sheltering rocks;
Down from the rivulets, red with dashing rains,
The gathering floods burst o'er the distant plains;
Beneath the blasts the leafless forests groan;
The hollow caves return a sullen moan.
Ye hills, ye plains, ye forests, and ye caves,
Ye howling winds and wintry swelling waves!
Unheard, unseen, by human ear or eye,
Sad to your sympathetic scenes I fly;
Where, to the whistling blast and waters' roar,
Pale Scotia's recent wound I may deplore.

. . . . . .

Wrongs, injuries, from many a darksome den,
Now gay in hope explore the paths of men;
See from his cavern grim Oppression rise,
And throw on poverty his cruel eyes;
Keen on the helpless victim see him fly,
And stifle, dark, the feebly bursting cry.
Mark ruffian violence, bestained with crimes,
Rousing elate in these degenerate times;
View unsuspecting Innocence a prey,
As guileful Fraud points out the erring way:
While subtle Litigation's pliant tongue
The life-blood equal sucks of Right and Wrong:
Hark! injured Want recounts the unlistened tale,
And much-wronged Misery pours the unpitied wail."

What! you will say, Was doggrel such as this, which would have been a disgrace to the dullest writer's clerk that ever borrowed a process, or the most illiterate messenger's concurrent that ever bungled an execution, composed by any man entitled to the name of a minstrel? Yes, in good truth, ladies and gentlemen, these lines were penned by a minstrel, and a very great

minstrel too—one of whom we are all most proud, with a catholic admiration emanating from all ranks and classes—a minstrel whose praises you heard celebrated not long ago in this very hall by my learned friend Lord Ardmillan. They were written in sober, I must also say sad, earnest by Robert Burns! I could give you many other instances of the same description, nearly, if not altogether as bad, from his pen. And why are they bad? Because he had deserted his native minstrel mode and impulse, and was attempting to write conventional verses on a principle vicious in itself, and which he had not thoroughly comprehended.

Now, you are not to suppose that I am decrying the merits of great poets who were not minstrels by these observations. I have far too much respect for art, too great a veneration for their genius, to do so. I simply say that most of the English poets want universality, so as to command the attention and sway the feelings of a mixed audience. And yet I must, in order to make myself thoroughly understood, and to vindicate my theory, go a little farther. And I maintain that poetry, however high, sublime, or polished, if it be composed only for silent reading, will never have the effect, even upon a cultivated audience, of that which is composed for recitation. Suppose I were to begin now to read you a canto of Spenser's 'Faery Queen.' The result would be that, in less than half an hour, you would all feel drowsy and lethargic with the sugared opiate of the cloying verse. If I were to propose to read to you Pope or Dryden, you would be justified in declining the offer, on the ground that a silent perusal would be much more profitable and conducive to enjoyment. Five hundred lines of Wordsworth's 'Excursion,' read aloud, would be equivalent to at least forty drops of the muriate of morphia. And, to come to a still higher instance, if the most accomplished elocutionist alive were to announce a reading of three consecutive books of Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' I should be sorry to undertake the risk of the hire of the apartment, and the other preliminary expenses, on the chance of being repaid by the proceeds of the sale of tickets. The fact is, that the old mode of oral intercourse or recitation which necessarily prevailed before the invention of printing, and especially before the enormous circulation of books (which, as an author, I certainly do not complain of), had some

special advantages. It was good for elocution—an art now miserably on the wane; and it made poetry national, which is not the case at the present time. There is nothing national in either Spenser, or Milton, or Pope, or Dryden, or Byron, or Wordsworth, or many more. They are great poets, no doubt, but the people don't sympathise with them, though portions of the more intellectual and educated classes may do so; and, take them altogether, what kind of congruity either of sentiment or form do you find in their works? But take Burns, and Scott, and Hogg, and Motherwell, and Allan Cunningham, with their predecessors David Lyndsay and Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson,—these are the adored of the people. And why? Because they are minstrels, and because they embody in vivid strains the emotions, thoughts—ay, prejudices, if you will—which are most rife in the national bosom.

But the distinction between natural poetry, which is minstrelsy, and artificial poetry, which, in default of a better name, you may call æsthetical composition, is a great deal earlier than the invention of printing. There was as much difference seven hundred years ago between the manners and tastes of the courtly circles, and those of the class upon whom the rays of royalty had never fallen, as exists just now. For example, there were the Troubadours, whose shadows sometimes reappear upon the modern stage in slashed doublets and silken hose, with citherns slung over their shoulders. That is a caricature. The Troubadours were men of birth and accomplishment, who had taken their degrees at the poetical college of Arles, and who adapted themselves entirely to the taste of the country. Many of them were warriors of distinguished valour, as was Bertrand de Born, comrade of the lion-hearted Richard. They thought nothing of despatching, for their own individual shares, some twenty Saracens per diem, or of practising dental surgery on the jaws of some recusant Israelite who was over tenacious of his coin. But in the evening, when they sate on the dais, and were asked to sing, they cooed like doves, or warbled as innocently as sentimental nightingales. Let me beseech your patience if I am guilty of an act of gross presumption, pardonable only because there is a licence for folly among friends, and introduce you to the hall at Rotherwood, a

full month before the Templar Brian de Bois-Guilbert and the Prior Aymer paid their notable visit. It is supper-time:—

"Gurth!" said the steward Oswald, as the retainers of Cedric addressed themselves seriously to the discussion of their mess of pork and pulse; "Gurth—who may be that popinjay whom thou hast brought hither to-night? See, he hath his beard curled after the French fashion, and when he looks at the Lady Rowena he sighs as if he were scant of breath. I warrant him no true knight, though his spurs would betoken him as such!"

"Zeynebock seize me, if I either know or care," replied Gurth, as articulately as he could through a mouthful of half-masticated bacon. "'A called himself a Trottinger, or Troubledoor, or something of the sort. Marry! but that he had a token from Athelstane of Coningsburg, I had given him lodgings in the marsh!"

"Troubadour, thou meanest, friend Gurth," said Oswald, with an air of superior knowledge. "I have heard much of the order. Then is he skilled in music——"

"As a pig in a high wind!" interrupted Wamba, whose restless disposition had brought him from behind his master's chair to the lower end of the apartment. "He hath the true singing face, and is even now twitching his fingers as though he longed for the strings of his lute."

And, in effect, the observation of the fool was justified by the appearance of the knightly bard. So long as the banquet lasted, he had displayed considerable powers of consumption, having done more justice than an anchorite would have desired to the venison, kid, wild-fowl, and other dainties which graced the board. Neither did he show him without curiosity in the article of fluids, having quaffed with apparent gusto the mead, malvoisie, and hippocras, until his preference, like that of a wooer who desires a permanent match, seemed to light upon the vintage of Gascony, to which he continued devotionally faithful. Notwithstanding this, he found time for many glances at the Lady Rowena, whose indifference he could not comprehend; but when Cedric began to talk of his cattle, the Troubadour leaned back in his chair, and fairly gave vent to a yawn.

"Sir Knight!" said the Thane, curbing with great difficulty

his naturally impatient temper, "if thou art wearied with the fatigue of the journey, our steward will light thee to thy chamber. If it is the fatigue of my conversation which oppresses thee, remember that since the meal was over thou hast hardly uttered a word, and the best hound that ever was whelped cannot run long without babbling!"

"Forgive me, O most beauteous lady, and do you, most respectable Vavasour, for such I understand to be your title, pardon the frailty of the body which craves solace from the mind. Much have I benefited by thy food, excellent host, for worse fare have I met with on the coasts of Naphtali and the regions round about Sidon, though there they put not garlic in their pottage, as is the ancient yet somewhat full-flavoured practice of the Saxon race; yet though our banquet after battle were no more than a handful of dates or dried figs, or a stripe of withered antelope—though our beverage was drawn from the brackish waters of the creek—we had minstrelsy to cheer our souls!"

"Sir Troubadour," replied Cedric, curtly, "minstrels have I none in my household, for our bards sing not save in honour of the race which no longer rules in this land. But my hall is ever open to those who can chant in the Saxon or Danish tongue; and yonder, at the bottom of the board, sits one whom I guess to be a jongleur, albeit he is no Provençal. If it be your wish, I shall bid him sing a ditty of the ancient time."

"Not for worlds, excellent Thane," ejaculated the Troubadour, with a grimace; "not for the recapture of Jerusalem would I listen to the strains of a traditionary boor. But, since no better minstrel is present, even I myself will essay; and being under oath for the time to abstain from singing my own lays, I shall ravish your ears and those of this fair company by a strain of Bertrand de Ventadour, lover of the wife of Count Eblis the Second!"

"Eblis!" quoth Wamba, who had found his way back to his accustomed seat; "why, uncle, is not that a Saracen name for the devil?"

"Silence, sirrah!" said Cedric, apart; "what matters it to thee or me whether the Norman or the foul fiend had the worst of the intrigue?"

And the Troubadour, having beckoned to his squire Raoul for his viol, and having proved its strings, began thus to sing in a voice tolerably modulated, but marred with extreme affectatation :—

When I behold the lark upspring,
  Twang, twing, twang!
And quiver lightly on his wing,
    Twing, twang!
I think of thee, my lady fair,
And very heavy is my care,
      Twang!
Because I also am not there,
      Twang!

All self-command is now gone by,
  Twang, twing, twang!
Thou art the mirror to my eye,
    Twing, twang!
What can I do? what can I say?
My heart is like a stag at bay,
      Twang!
And I must go or else decay,
      Twang!

Having finished this delectable ditty, the knightly Troubadour, who, during the process of singing, had addressed himself as pointedly as he durst to the Lady Rowena, heaved a deep sigh, and sank exhausted upon his seat. A dead silence followed.

"And is this," said Cedric, "the poetry which wins favour in the eyes of King Richard?"

"Of a surety it is," replied the Troubadour; "no better poet than Bertrand de Ventadour ever won his degree from the high court of Arles save one whom I may not mention, since his vow obligeth him to be dumb!"

"Now, by the soul of Hengist!" cried Cedric, "thy tidings rejoice me, Sir Troubadour! As the body of man can be sustained only through generous food, so can a noble spirit be fostered only by mighty song. And I pray to Saint Dunstan that the house

of Plantagenet may continue to refresh themselves with such spiritual nutriment!"

"Amen! worthy Thane," replied the Troubadour, evidently gratified by the implied compliment. "There is, in fact, in these lays—which are, like precious jewels, not to be paraded to the gaze of the vulgar—a delicacy, a refinement, a taste as it were, which your coarser minstrels cannot attain unto. Now, were it possible to hear one of them, after such divine delectation, utter his amorous note, trust me that even your serfs would be able to perceive the difference."

"I doubt not of it," said Cedric, "and it may be we can put it to the proof. Oswald, what knave is that who sits below Gurth the swineherd?"

"A Saxon minstrel, so please you," replied the steward; "an Elric of Wolfhamstede. He can sing the songs of Cædmon and Beowulf, and the old ditties of the Dane."

"Saxon song I brook not in my hall in the presence of the stranger; it makes the hand too ready to grapple with the haft of the battle-axe. But, Oswald, take the minstrel this cup of wine. Tell him, for the honour of the old blood, to chant a song of the Scalds, and the rougher it be the better. Fear not for your lark, Sir Troubadour; its flight is too high to be followed."

"It pleaseth you to say so," replied the Troubadour; "and although it is not my wont to hearken unto rude sounds, even as men avoid the crashing of falling timber, yet will I wait and listen, lest peradventure there may be some touch of minstrelsy in the song of yonder rough companion."

"Well, Oswald," said the Thane of Rotherwood, "what says the old man?"

"Elric of Wolfhamstede is honoured by your message; and though his voice is weak with age, and his memory is not bright as of old, he will essay the death-song of Regnor Lodbrog, the brave King of Norway, who perished in the dungeons of Northumberland by the bite of serpents."

"A dreadful tale!" said Cedric, musingly. "That Regnor Lodbrog, if I recollect aright, was taken captive by his deadly enemy Ella, and cast into a vault among snakes and venomous

things that preyed upon his vitals; and so long as the breath was in him he was heard chanting of his victories and prophesying revenge!"

"Bad taste," said the Troubadour, shuddering; "bad taste in the extreme."

"Will your tuneful valour deign to answer a question from a simple fool?" said Wamba, who had picked up some fragments of information from itinerant foreigners. "Have you ever heard of a certain Lord of Fayel?"

"Who hath not?" replied the Troubadour; "he was the flower of Christian chivalry."

"And yet, if all tales be true," answered Wamba, "he forced his lady to eat the heart of her lover, the Castellan de Coucy, which was sent her at the request of the dying man from the Holy Land!"

"Thou art right, knave, in thy surmise," said the Troubadour; "the deed is famous in song, and was renowned throughout Christendom."

"Then beshrew me," said Wamba, "if I can see why this Regnor did ill in singing when his own heart was being eaten."

"Silence, boy," cried Cedric; "and you, fellows of mine, make a hall for Elric of Wolfhamstede, and let us hear a genuine Norse ditty, since the Saxon may not sing the praises of his forefathers under his own rafter."

And silence prevailed, and the old minstrel rose up in his place, and, without the aid of instrumental music, delivered the following remarkable poem, perhaps the most ancient which exists in any tongue now intelligible in Europe since the rule of the Romans was over—more ancient, indeed, by centuries, than the extinction of their speech as a distinct and current language:—

DEATH-SONG OF REGNOR LODBROG.

We have fought with our swords, hurrah!
Few years had we to form us,
When we sailed, for Thora's sake, to slay
The Gothland snake enormous:
'Twas from the swine I took the name,

Which ever since I've carried;
For rough in shaggy arms I came,
And in the monster buried
My bright broadsword that day, &c. &c.

"What think ye of that, Sir Knight?" said Cedric to the Troubadour when the wild chant was ended.

"There can be but one opinion," replied the latter. "It is poor, rude, and opposed to all the rules of taste. I am thoroughly disgusted by it. And I marvel, good Thane, that you have the patience to listen to anything so vile!"

"Oswald," cried Cedric, rising, "I pray you, without delay, to light my noble guest to his chamber."

So ends my impertinent fragmentary chapter; but it is not without a meaning, if you have followed me throughout. Let us pass to another branch of the subject.

The marriage of the Prince of Wales in February 1862 inspired Aytoun to the composition of a 'Nuptial Ode,' in which all the fervour of his loyalty to the Crown found eloquent expression. Of all the verses that were written on this auspicious event, this Ode was unquestionably the best. It is framed upon the model of Spenser's Epithalamium, and its fine imagery and beautiful versification not unpleasantly recall the picturesque glow and "linked sweetness" of that great masterpiece of melodious verse.

Writing was, however, no longer the pleasant labour to Aytoun which it had formerly been; and he found his strength no more than equal to the duties of his professorship and sheriffdom, which once used to sit upon him so lightly. After 1862, therefore, he wrote but little. Living alone, and avoiding general society as he did, the pressure of this solitary life on his warm

and affectionate disposition was obviously most unfavourable to his health. It was therefore a source of satisfaction to his friends when, in December 1863, he sought relief from it in a second marriage. "I have a piece of news for you," he wrote to me on 17th December 1863, "which I am sure will give you pleasure. Know then that I am about to be married, and that on Christmas eve I hope to be no longer a solitary man. . . . I am sure I shall have your congratulations and those of dear Lady Helen; and when you see the lady, which I trust may be in the early part of next year, I shall give you leave to pitch me from the column, as Firmilian did Haverillo, if you do not approve of my choice." The lady whose affections he had the good fortune to secure, Miss Kinnear, was nearly related to his valued friends the Balfours of Trenabie in Orkney. Inspired as she was by a generous sympathy with the undimmed devotion with which he cherished the memory of his former wife, and endeared to him by her own attractive qualities, this union was one of unbroken happiness. For some time his health seemed steadily to improve. He looked and spoke once more like his former self, and his friends began to hope that he had taken a renewed lease of life. But in the winter of 1864 some of the old distressing symptoms reappeared, and it became only too clear that some organic malady was undermining his strength. He complained of great weakness and languor, and felt exertion of any kind to be irksome. He made light of these symptoms to his

friends, and spoke and wrote of them as indicating merely temporary derangement. Instead of going abroad as he had done the four previous years, he resolved to try the effect of quiet summer quarters in Scotland; and with this view took a lease of Blackhills, near Elgin, a property of Lord Fife's, most agreeably situated, and where he could command excellent shooting and fishing. His intimate friends were put under promise to visit him; and hither he went with Mrs Aytoun in the beginning of June. His interest in politics, always keen, had been greatly stimulated by the return of his party to power, and by the approaching election. Ill as he was, he found strength to write a vigorous political article for 'Blackwood,' little dreaming it was to be his last. He also looked forward to presiding as Sheriff at the nomination of the member for Orkney, and gave all the necessary instructions for carrying through the election with his usual forethought and precision.

The following letter to Mr Robertson was written two days after his arrival at Blackhills:—

BLACKHILLS, ELGIN, *June* 2, 1865.

MY DEAR ROBERTSON,—You will, I am sure, not suspect me of any want of sympathy in having failed to write you since I heard of your brother William's death. The explanation is, that I have been ill, and was quite unable to do anything for nearly six weeks. It was a sort of low intermittent fever, not perilous, but very debilitating; and, though I am now much better, I am not yet a Samson in body, nor a Machiavelli in intellect. However, I hope to receive much benefit from the northern air, which, though somewhat sharp, is in fresh contrast to the reek

of Edinburgh. We arrived here two days ago, and have nearly settled down. It is a sweet spot—the house very commodious and well furnished, in the midst of a luxuriant, sheltered, and productive garden-ground, and a very magnificent view over the Laigh of Moray extending to the sea. There are also good shootings attached, which will furnish occupation and amusement for the winter months. We are not quite *in conspectu* of Orkney, but on a clear day the Caithness and Sutherland hills are visible; and by aid of a small steamer from Burghead to Golspie, Wick is easily visible.

. . . . . .

I think it likely that the Conservative party will make a strong push this general election in England and Ireland; and there are very fair prospects of success. The debate and division on Mr Baines's Bill have made visible healthy symptoms in the state of the body politic.

When I left Edinburgh the General Assembly was just breaking up. My own opinion is, that the decision of the majority, with regard to innovations, is a fortunate one for the future stability of the Kirk; though perhaps you, along with others of our friends, may take the opposite view.

On the 25th of the same month he writes to Mr Blackwood: "I have been better for the last two or three days, and hope I have fairly got the turn, but I must not hollo before I am fairly out of the wood. Health and sickness are from God's hands, and I ought to be thankful that I am not worse, and am well tended."

On the 26th June he again writes to Mr Robertson: "My present intention is to take the steamer on the evening of the 14th at Aberdeen, and proceed direct to Lerwick; and having finished my business there, to be in Kirkwall on the 25th. I hope by that time to be strong enough for the journey, which, to say the truth,

I am not just at present; for though I am pretty nearly quit of *internal* maladies, I am very weak in my legs, and not able to stand much fatigue. God be thanked, however, I am better than I was, and a sort of painful lassitude, which had oppressed me for nearly two months, has passed away. I have been able to write a political article for 'Blackwood.'"

The hope here expressed was soon dispelled, for in a letter to his friend three days afterwards (in Mrs Aytoun's handwriting), he announces that his "attendance at the nomination" of the member for Orkney "is impossible. I have not recovered my health here so rapidly as I expected; and the doctor says I must not try the journey north for three weeks to come. I shall therefore, in all probability, visit Shetland about the 24th of July, and be in Orkney to hold my courts in the first week in August. Of that I shall give timeous notice to F———, from whom I have an illegible letter this morning about Dante and the Droits of the Admiralty."

The symptoms of his illness had indeed become sufficiently alarming. On the 1st of July he had so far recovered as to be able to write with his own hand to Mr Blackwood:—

My dear Blackwood,—It is a luxury to hear from you again. I have been seriously out of sorts since we met, and three days ago *cowped over* in a fainting fit, brought on by pure exhaustion, extreme sobriety, and over-much medicine. I *never* was so done for before; but we sent for an Elgin doctor—a perfect Hercules of a fellow—who came immediately, and has been administering brandy like a trump. He is not satisfied unless I take a dose of

it with arrowroot in the middle of the night, besides handsomely lacing my tea. The improvement is almost magical, but I am very weak, and require a deal of feeding up. So much for over abstinence, which in certain cases I take to be an abominable mistake.

I hope the elections will go right for us. It strikes me with amazement that I can find nowhere in the 'Times' any reference to the probabilities of the result in Ireland. Surely that is a good feature for us.

Edinburgh has been, in so far as regards the Conservatives, a bungle. . . .

I am not allowed to write much, so merely send these lines, with my best regards to you and Julia, as a token of remembrance.

I should tell you the doctors hold me to be free from any kind of organic complaint. It seems doubtful if ever the liver was affected. My requirements were lunch and liquor.

I go down to Zetland, if strong enough, in three weeks, not earlier. Country lovely.

Under the generous regimen established by Dr Ross, he seemed for a time to regain strength, and on the 13th July he again writes to Mr Robertson:—

You will have to preside at the nomination in my absence, which please, if you notice it at all, touch very lightly. There is already a paragraph about my health in circulation.

I wish I could say that it was altogether without foundation, but I really had a bad attack, culminating about a fortnight ago in a fainting fit. I am much better now, under the treatment of Dr Ross of Elgin, who is no slavish auxiliary of the druggist, but prescribes plenty of animal food, wine, and brandy; his theory being that I have tried my constitution by living greatly too low. I am satisfied that he is right, for during last winter I was as abstemious as an anchorite: behold the result! But though better in health I am wretchedly weak, and can as yet do nothing more than take gentle carriage exercise. I had fixed to go to Zetland on the 21st of this month, but this is absolutely

forbidden: as Ross says, I am utterly unfit for the voyage: so that I must put off my visit both to Orkney and Zetland until September at the earliest. . . .

I can write no more, being wearied both hand and brain, with the composition of many letters.

Next day (14th July) he wrote with something of his wonted cheerfulness to Mr Blackwood:—

Dr Ross, from whose treatment I have received great benefit during the fortnight he has attended me, is peremptory against my working my brain until I am physically stronger; and I am quite sure he is right, for a few days ago the mere effort of finding rhymes for some macaronic verses I had commenced, wearied me in a way I previously would have deemed incredible. However, I *am*, thank God, much better than I was; and having, as far as discoverable, no organic complaint, I may hope, with care and perseverance in a generous diet, to get back my strength. As regards the stores of the druggist I am "parcus cultor et infrequens," taking nothing beyond a solution of iron; but, *en revanche*, I am put upon a most liberal allowance of animal food, brandy, and claret.

I have abandoned the idea of going down to the islands in the mean time, and shall put off my visit until a much later period of the season. I shall hope to be able to take the hill on the 12th of August, and would be seriously grieved if prevented, for my keeper, who was over part of the ground on Monday, gives an excellent account of the young broods; and I have purveyed me a steady white pony—*nomine* Missy, which name I have elevated into that of "the Muse"—well adapted for trotting through the heather. Do you think you could come down here for that sport? I need not say how joyfully you will be welcomed; and I can assure you that there are few prettier or more enjoyable places to be found in the north of Scotland than this same residence of Blackhills. The range of grouse-ground is very fair, but the extent of the low-country shooting is immense; and though partridges have not been *very* plentiful in the district for some years, there are hares enough to excite to frenzy the scalping instincts of a Choctaw. Think of this; for I certainly

shall not migrate southwards this year until summoned by the approaching exigencies of the session.

These cheerful anticipations were not to be realised. They were but the last flicker of the expiring flame; and soon afterwards his disease made startling progress. A few hours before his death he was told by his doctor that his end was approaching. He received the announcement quite calmly. Death had no terrors for one who had long accustomed himself to look it steadily in the face, and striven to prepare himself for its final summons. He remained in full possession of his faculties to the last, and, expressing his firm trust in his Saviour, he quietly fell asleep at one in the morning of the 4th of August. So rapidly had he sunk after the fatal symptoms had shown themselves, that his sisters, summoned by telegram from Edinburgh, did not arrive till some hours after his death. "We went straight to his room," writes one of them, "and there he lay like a statue, with a heavenly smile upon his lips, and the colour in his cheek. It did not look like death; and they had laid him out with bunches of his favourite white roses on his breast."

His body was removed to Edinburgh, and laid in the Dean Cemetery, in the same grave with that of his first wife, and not far from the resting-place of what was mortal of her illustrious father. The spot is beautiful, and aptly chosen. His favourite flowers blossom around his tomb; and through the trees that line the wooded bank of the Water of Leith may be seen the castled crag that overhangs "his own romantic town," and the

church, St John's, under whose shadow rest the father and mother whom he loved so well, and where, from boyhood upwards, he had reverently attended the services, and sought the consolations of religion.*

It is not for me to attempt to define Aytoun's place in literature. I lived too near him, and loved the man too well, to be an impartial critic of his work, even were I disposed, which I am not, to sit in judgment upon it. In these days of restless productiveness, when reputations are made and superseded more rapidly than ever before in the history of literature, who shall say how many or how few of the men who have made a deep impression on their contemporaries will be remembered by the next generation? Greater poets than Aytoun—and of the present century, too—are now little read, but they are not the less, therefore, great poets. The power which spoke to men's hearts so strongly once, remains in their works to speak to them still. So, I believe, will it be with the best of Aytoun's

* While these sheets are passing through the press, Sir Archibald Alison, a very dear and honoured friend of Aytoun's, has been laid to sleep not far from him, in what seems likely to become the Scottish Campo Santo. Purer soul or higher heart than Alison's never beat in human breast.

"Cui pudor et justitiæ soror
Incorruptu fides nudaque veritas
Quando ullum inveniet parem?"

The knightly virtues of courage, frankness, simplicity, forbearance, courtesy, constancy, were his in a pre-eminent degree. His very adversaries—and he had none, except in politics—were attracted to him and loved him. Who shall say what his loss has been to his friends?

poems. Fashions in poetry may alter, but so long as the themes with which they deal have an interest for his countrymen, his 'Lays' will find, as they do now, a wide circle of admirers. His powers as a humorist were perhaps greater than as a poet. They have certainly been more widely appreciated. His immediate contemporaries owe him much, for he has contributed largely to that kindly mirth without which the strain and struggle of modern life would be intolerable. Much that is excellent in his humorous writings may very possibly cease to retain a place in literature from the circumstance that he deals with characters and peculiarities which are in some measure local, and phases of life and feeling and literature which are more or less ephemeral. But much will certainly continue to be read and enjoyed by the sons and grandsons of those for whom it was originally written; and his name will be coupled with those of Wilson, Lockhart, Sidney Smith, Peacock, Jerrold, Mahony, and Hood, as that of a man gifted with humour as genuine and original as theirs, however opinions may vary as to the order of their relative merits.

But fame or no fame seems but of small account in looking back upon the records of any man's life, however eminent. The question is rather, how and to what ends has he used the powers with which he was endowed? Was he loved, trusted, honoured by those who knew him best? The answer in Aytoun's case is clear, and it is confirmed by the issues of his life. By persevering culture he made the most of his natural gifts.

He was true to his genius, setting that above the wealth and professional distinction which he might easily have reaped had he turned a deaf ear to the "deep poetic voice" that spoke within him. Deeply imbued with all that is best in literature, his influence as a critic and teacher was always used to expose what was false to nature, mean in thought, meretricious or ephemeral in style, and to call attention to what was highest and truest in tone and purest in expression. His range of topics was wide, but all he wrote was ever on the side of virtue and honour and religion. His wildest sallies of humour never strayed into coarseness or irreverence, and he was intolerant of both in other men. It has been truly said of him, that "his life altogether was a successful and happy one. Its success he owed to an unusual combination of genius, industry, and prudence; and its happiness to his bright and genial temperament and equable temper." He was the warmest and most loyal of friends, and, because he was so, he was most happy in his friendships. He was beloved as a son, a brother, and a husband. He had a side for all men; he understood and could make allowance for all peculiarities; and he was quick to appreciate and frank to acknowledge merit of every kind. He was singularly gentle, just, considerate, and forbearing to everything but meanness, vulgarity, and conceit; and even when most provoked by these, he would, out of his large charity, find excuses for "the weak but well-meaning creatures" in whom they had been offensively shown.

His duties, public and private, he discharged with conscientious zeal, and with the chivalrous courtesies of a true-hearted gentleman. Therefore he died honoured by his fellow-citizens, and deeply mourned by those who had the happiness to know him as a friend.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX.

ENDYMION; OR, A FAMILY PARTY OF OLYMPUS.

A ROMANCE.—1842.

CHAPTER I.

'TWAS a hot season in the skies. Sirius held the ascendant, and under his influence even the radiant band of the Celestials began to droop, while the great ball-room of Olympus grew gradually more and more deserted. For nearly a week had Orpheus, the leader of the heavenly orchestra, played to a deserted floor. The *élite* would no longer figure in the waltz. Juno obstinately kept her room, complaining of headache and ill-temper. Ceres, who had lately joined a dissenting congregation, objected generally to all frivolous amusements; and Minerva had established, in opposition, a series of literary soirees, at which Pluto nightly lectured on the fine arts and phrenology to a brilliant and fashionable audience. The Muses, with Hebe and some of the younger deities, alone frequented the assemblies; but with all their attractions there was still a sad lack of partners. The younger gods had of late become remarkably dissipated, messed three times a-week, at least, with Mars in the barracks, and seldom separated sober. Bacchus had been sent to Coventry by the ladies, for appearing one night in the ball-room, after a hard

sederunt, so drunk that he measured his length upon the floor, after a vain attempt at a Mazurka; and they likewise eschewed the company of Pan, who had become an abandoned smoker, and always smelt infamously of cheroots. But the most serious defection, as also the most unaccountable, was that of the beautiful Diana,—*par excellence* the *belle* of the season,—and assuredly the most graceful nymph that ever tripped along the halls of heaven. She had gone off suddenly to the country without alleging any intelligible excuse, and with her the last attraction of the ball-room seemed to have disappeared. Even Venus, the perpetual lady patroness, saw that the affair was desperate.

"Ganymede, *mon beau garçon*," said she, one evening at an unusually thin assembly, "we must really give it up at last. Matters are growing worse and worse, and in another week we shall positively not have enough to get up a tolerable gallopade. Look at these seven poor Muses sitting together on the sofa. Not a soul has spoken to them to-night, except that horrid Silenus, who dances nothing but Scotch reels."

"*Pardieu!*" replied the young Trojan, fixing his glass in his eye. "There may be a reason for that. The girls are decidedly *passées*, and most inveterate blues. But there's dear little Hebe, who never wants partners, though that clumsy Hercules insists upon his conjugal rights, and keeps moving after her like an enormous shadow. 'Pon my soul, I've a great mind—Do you think, *ma belle tante*, that anything might be done in that quarter?"

"O fie! Ganymede—fie for shame!" said Flora, who was sitting close to the Queen of Love, and overheard the conversation. "You horrid naughty man, how can you talk so?"

"*Pardon, ma chère!*" replied the exquisite, with a languid smile. "You must excuse my *badinage;* and, indeed, a glance of your fair eyes were enough at any time to recall me to my senses. By the way, what a beautiful *bouquet* you have there. *Parole d'honneur*, I am quite jealous. May I ask who sent it?"

"What a goose you are!" said Flora, in evident confusion; "how should I know? Some general admirer like yourself, I suppose."

"Apollo is remarkably fond of hyacinths, I believe," said

Ganymede, looking significantly at Venus. "Ah, well! I see how it is. We poor detrimentals must break our hearts in silence. It is clear we have no chance with the *preux chevalier* of heaven."

"Really, Ganymede, you are very severe this evening," said Venus, with a smile; "but tell me, have you heard anything of Diana?"

"Ah! *la belle Diane?* They say she is living in the country, somewhere about Caria, at a place they call Latmos Cottage, cultivating her faded roses—what a colour Hebe has!—and studying the sentimental."

"*Tant pis!* She is a great loss to us," said Venus. "*Apropos*, you will be at Neptune's *fête champêtre* to-morrow, *ne c'est pas?* We shall then finally determine about abandoning the assemblies. But I must go home now. The carriage has been waiting this hour, and my doves may catch cold. I suppose that boy, Cupid, will not be home till all the hours of the morning."

"Why, I believe, the Rainbow Club *does* meet to-night after the dancing," said Ganymede, significantly. "This is the last oyster-night of the season."

"Gracious goodness! The boy will be quite tipsy," said Venus. "Do, dear Ganymede! try to keep him sober. But now, give me your arm to the cloak-room."

"*Volontiers!*" said the exquisite.

As Venus rose to go, there was a rush of persons to the further end of the room, and the music ceased. Presently two or three voices were heard calling for Esculapius.

"What's the row?" asked that learned individual, advancing leisurely from the refreshment table, where he had been cramming himself with tea and cakes.

"Leda's fainted!" shrieked Calliope, who rushed past with her vinaigrette in hand.

"Gammon!" growled the Abernethy of heaven, as he followed her.

"Poor Leda!" said Venus, as her cavalier adjusted her shawl. "These fainting fits are decidedly alarming. I hope it is nothing more serious than the weather."

"I hope so too," said Ganymede. "Let me put on the scarf. But people will talk. Pray heaven it be not a second edition of that old scandal about the eggs!"

"*Fi donc!* you odious creature! How can you? But after all, stranger things have happened. There now, have done. Good-night!" and she stepped into her chariot.

"*Bon soir,*" said the exquisite, kissing his hand as it rolled away. "'Pon my soul, that's a splendid woman. I've a great mind—but there's no hurry about that. *Revenons à nos œufs.* I must learn something more about this fainting fit."

So saying, Ganymede reascended the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

A BRIGHTER or more exhilarating sun never dawned upon Olympus than that which ushered in the *fête champêtre*, given by Neptune, perhaps the most popular middle-aged deity of the times. The magnificent lawn of his celestial villa was decorated for the occasion in a manner perfectly unique, even for heaven. A new entrance-gate had been built entirely of conch shells; tents, fringed with costly seaware, were erected on every part of the grounds, and the ample tables they contained were stored with refreshments, terrestrial as well as marine. Crowds of Nereids and Tritons were engaged as waiters on the guests, whilst, in the largest of the artificial ponds, Proteus, the celebrated juggler, who had been retained expressly for the occasion, went through a variety of aquatic evolutions,—sometimes imitating Sam Patch, the famous diver of Niagara, and sometimes assuming the terrific appearance of the great American sea-serpent. At an early hour, the company, which comprised the whole fashion of Olympus, were assembled in the villa, and after partaking of a sumptuous *dejeûner à la fourchette*, broke up into groups according to their several fancies, and strolled through the pleasure-ground in search of amusement. With the reader's

leave we shall play the spy upon one *tête-à-tête* held in a sequestered arbour.

"And so you preferred listening to Pluto's lecture on the dissolving views, instead of meeting me, as you promised, at the assembly! Pretty conduct, indeed, Mr Apollo, after all that has passed between us!" said our fair acquaintance, Flora, pouting, to a very handsome young man, with a magnificent head of hair, who strove to detain her reluctant hand in his own. "You needn't squeeze my fingers that way. I should have known you better. False, deceitful wretch that you are!"

"Nay! not false, not deceitful, my own charming Flora," replied Apollo, with much *empressement* in his manner. "You know Pluto is my uncle, and that I have great expectations from him; but I swear by Styx, that rather than draw one tear from the lovely eyes of my Spring-queen, I would pull the venerable codger by the nose!"

"Would you indeed?" said Flora.

"On my honour, I would, if you insisted on it. But why speak more of this? Can you doubt my love—my constancy?"

"Did Daphne find you constant?" asked Flora, with a sigh.

"Daphne? Daphne be hanged!" cried Apollo, vehemently. "She had the thickest ankles in the whole Peloponnesus! Speak not of her—but you, my own, my gentle Flora!—can you doubt that this fond heart beats, trembles only for you? O, on these rosy lips let me impress——"

"Lawk!" screamed Flora, "there's somebody coming."

And, sure enough, two youths in military undress sauntered past the entrance of the arbour; and the keen glances they cast within sufficiently betokened their perfect consciousness of the proceedings of the amorous deity.

"Ah, Pollux! ah, Castor! my fine fellows, how are ye?" said Apollo, with great effrontery, rising and presenting a finger to each. "What sort of blow-out had you at Mars's last night? Pan and the rest, I presume, eh? Screwed, of course?"

"Tol-lol," said the eldest of the Gemini.

"I can easily believe it," said Apollo. "By the way, Pollux" —and he led the Argonaut aside—"you needn't say anything about seeing me and Flora together in the arbour—you under-

stand? Not that it signifies a brass copper, but the confounded people here will always be talking, and I don't wish to have the poor girl annoyed. There's a good fellow—give a hint to your brother too, and both of you come and dine with me on Wednesday next at seven."

"I'm your man!" said Pollux. "Dinner and dumbness is the word! But I say, Apollo—really, now, ar'n't you coming it rather strong?"

"Devil a bit!" said the Captain of the Archers. "Flo and I are old friends, and we flirt with each other merely to keep our hands in practice. But come, let us all take a turn and see the fun."

The four proceeded from the arbour together. Several of the Celestials who encountered them stopped the Gemini, inquiring eagerly after Leda, their mother's health.

"What the deuce do the people mean?" said Castor, after several such interruptions. "The old lady is as strong as a cart-horse, and ate four muffins this morning."

"Glad to hear it," said Apollo, dryly. "But come, let us walk upon the terrace, and look over the battlements of Olympus."

To that favourite spot they went, and bent over the blue cerulean, while the massive orb of the earth lay beneath them, revolving like a mighty ball. Midway between, they marked a lustrous speck enlarging as it soared upwards, until it seemed to assume the lineaments of a human figure.

"By Jingo! that's Mercury!" cried Pollux; "why, he's two hours before his time."

"Mercury, is it?" cried Pan, who, with his friend Bacchus, now came up. "Then, please the pigs, I'll get my manillas at last."

"Oh, confound it!" said Bacchus. "He's a long way off yet. Let's go into one of the tents, and get a hot tumbler."

"No—no—man! stay a moment! There's Juno."

"*Bon jour, Messieurs,*" said the Imperial Queen, caressing her favourite pea-hen, who followed her with as much docility as the famous tame Transatlantic oyster. "What *can* you be looking at down there? Ah!" she exclaimed, adjusting her eyeglass,

"Mercury, I declare, and in a monstrous hurry, too! What possibly can have happened!"

The light figure of the messenger of Olympus now rose above the crystal battlements, and with one graceful circuitous sweep alighted in the midst of the Celestials. He was flushed and out of breath.

"Mr Mercury, I presume you have brought me the *esprit des milles fleurs?*" said Juno.

"Dear Mr Mercury, where's the *blonde?*" cried Flora.

"Mercury, my lad, did old Screwdriver cash that Bill?" inquired Apollo.

"What says Hoby?" said Pollux.

"And Stultz?" added Castor.

"Merks, old chap, shell out the cheroots," said Pan.

"And the *eau de vie!*" cried Bacchus, with a hiccup.

The herald of heaven looked from one to the other of his tormentors despairingly.

"I'll give up my place," said he; "by the Lord I will, rather than stand this bother! Do you think I had nothing to do but look after your traps, and such a shindy down yonder as never was? Where's Jupiter? My wig! what a rage he'll be in!"

"What's the matter, Mercury? Bless me, what is it?" cried all the gods and goddesses in a breath.

"Matter!" repeated the son of Maia; "matter enough, if you knew it. Diana's off—bolted—gone to Gretna Green, or the devil knows where."

"My sister eloped!" cried Apollo, hastily; "that's a lie!"

"Did you apply that expression to me, sir?" said Mercury, getting very red in the face, and squaring at the Pythian.

"Yes," said the other, delivering a left-hander; and to it they went with the unction of Dutch Sam and Aby Belasco.

The goddesses shrieked and squalled; the gods formed a ring, and shouted in extreme ecstasy. How long the combat might have lasted is uncertain; but a stately figure burst through the circle, and interposed between the pugilists.

"None of this nonsense," thundered Jupiter, in an overwhelming voice, "or I'll knock both of you to eternal smash! Apollo, you're an idiot; Mercury, you're another. Hold your tongues

both; or rather you, Mercury, speak and explain this blackguard behaviour."

"Please your excellency," said Mercury—— But what Mercury said had perhaps better form the commencement of a new chapter.

CHAPTER III.

"Please your Excellency," replied Mercury, "I said Diana had bolted——"

"Eh? what the devil! my daughter Di?"

"Off—eloped—absquatulated," replied Hermes, applying a slice of raw potato to his eye.

"Ten thousand Phlegethons! and with whom?"

"A pig-driver, may it please your Excellency."

Apollo fell into convulsions. Jupiter swore horribly.

"Ten shillings for profane oaths," said Chief-Justice Rhadamanthus, taking out his pencil; "I must book the governor for the tin."

"My Lord Chief-Justice," said Jupiter, "make out a warrant instantly for the apprehension of the audacious scoundrel who has made away with a ward of our celestial Chancery. What's his name, Mercury?"

"Endymion."

"For the apprehension of Endymion. I'll trounce the villain at common law, or my name's not Saturnius!"

Rhadamanthus did as he was desired; wrote out the warrant, and delivered it (along with a small note of the fees) to the Father of gods and men.

"Here—you, Mercury," said Jupiter, "take this warrant and execute it instantly. Bring the prisoner here, and that unfortunate girl along with him, and do it directly."

"Your Excellency," said the son of Maia, with considerable dignity—"your Excellency will please to remember that I am neither a bailiff nor a messenger's concurrent: if I undertake the job, I shall expect to be paid *extra*——"

"D'ye grumble, sirrah?" shouted Jupiter. "Be off like winking—or else——;" and he caught up a stray thunderbolt.

Hermes cleared the parapet of heaven.

"Here's a shindy!" said Pan. "Blowed if I could have believed it. Di looked as if butter wouldn't have melted in her mouth. What say you, Ganymede?"

The young Trojan indulged his curiosity with a supercilious stare at the questioner, muttered something about "vulgar fellows," and "d—d impertinence," turned on his heel, and walked away.

"Well—if I ever!" said Pan. "I've a confounded mind to pull the puppy's nose."

"No, no," said Bacchus, seizing his friend by the arm, "never mind the Jack-a-dandy. Come into this tent, and we'll have a pot and a pipe together."

Jupiter continued walking to and fro in a violent state of excitement. Most of the other deities had retired out of respect; but Juno would not lose such a charming opportunity for a few moral observations.

"Well, sir," said she, "this is a very pretty business indeed. Nice doings those for a daughter of yours! I presume you remember what I told you when you first allowed her to associate with my Lady Venus?"

"Madam," said Jupiter, "if I were to remember half of your idiotical conversation, I should have very little time to think of anything else."

"O, very good!" replied Juno, bitterly; "you may be as rude as you please, but that won't alter facts. I repeat that you have yourself and no one else to blame."

"Zounds, woman!" cried the exasperated deity, "will you hold your tongue? Here do I hardly know whether my head or heels are uppermost, and you keep pestering me with your palaver and Job's comfort."

"And this is my reward," said Juno, "for all my anxieties and cares? O you horrid—horrid brute!"

"Madam, don't provoke me to blacken your ox-eyes," roared Jupiter, in a towering passion. "And now I think of it—there's these confounded peacocks of yours have scratched up all the

vegetables in the garden; but I'll stop their tricks effectually. Here, Neptune! send for a blunderbuss."

"Don't! don't!" screamed Juno, in concert with her imperial fowls, who, as if conscious of their own imminent danger, set up such a peahawing as would have stunned terrestrial ears; "don't do any such thing, dear brother Neptune—for the love of Amphitrite, don't!"

There is no saying how the affair might have terminated, for Jupiter had picked up an enormous stone with a view to peppering the peacocks, when a cry from Castor, that Mercury was re-ascending with the prisoners, restored a temporary calm, and once more drew the whole hierarchy to the battlement.

CHAPTER IV.

The criminal van of the Celestial Courts was shaped something like an Irish close car, so that until it was fairly landed on the terrace none of the eager company could catch a glimpse of those within.

Mercury sprang from the box. "Well, here they are safe and sound, and a pretty business I've had in catching them. Walk out, my doves. Here's a jolly party waiting for you." And he opened the door.

To the utter amazement of Olympus, who expected the apparition of a curly-haired swarthy Asiatic, clad in tunic and buskins, after the fashion of the Carian pig-drivers, out stepped from the vehicle a tall, sandy-haired, raw-boned individual of six feet, arrayed from head to foot in a suit of tartans of more lustrous dye than the fancy petticoat of Iris; in short, a Highlander in full costume—the first that ever set foot in the heathen heaven. After him descended Diana, blushing and in tears, yet still peerless in immortal beauty. A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembled circle, which, however, produced no effect upon the undaunted Scot, who continued to gaze around him with stoical indifference.

"Who the devil have we got here?" said Jupiter at length. "Are you Endymion, fellow?"

"Aum the individual that was arreested at your instance," replied the Highlander, calmly, "in token of which I have here a copy of the charge, manifestly incompetent, as not having been executed by a regular messenger; and I reserve to mysell a' richt of action of damages for wrongous imprisonment and otherwise, as accords of law."

"What the deuce does the fellow mean?" said the bewildered Jupiter.

"My lord," interposed Rhadamanthus, "these matters had better be discussed *in pleno foro*. If it please your lordship to take your seat as Supreme Judge, you can constitute the Session, and proceed in common form to try this embarrassing case."

"Ye may do as ye like," replied the Scot; "but as a preliminary defence, I plead the privileges of the College of Justice. Aum an advocate's first clerk, and in no way amenable to ony jurisdiction, except that o' my ain Coort. *Vide* Bothwell *v.* Maitland, December 1582.—*Morrison*, page 2399."

"What's the meaning of this jargon?" asked Jupiter.

"A declinature of jurisdiction, my Lord," said Rhadamanthus; "but it won't do. Fellow, that plea must be dismissed, as you are now beyond the bounds of the Court of Session."

"I was arreested in Scotland, forty miles north o' Gretna, on the Carlisle road," persevered the Scot; "and the lad wi' the wings in his bannet hadna even a Border warrant, though that wadna hae been competent neither."

"Is this the fact, Mercury?" asked Rhadamanthus.

"'Pon my soul, I believe so," replied Mercury.

"Then Jupiter's in an ugly scrape, that's all; and the action must be dismissed," said Rhadamanthus.

"Ye're a wise judge, ma lord," said the Scot, with a bow, "and weel versed in the Principles. Ye might make a first-rate Ordinar on the Bills. I submit that I am entitled to full expenses."

"Of course," replied the gratified Rhadamanthus.

"And is this confounded rascal to get off Scot-free, after having eloped with my daughter?" asked Jupiter.

"That's the law," said Rhadamanthus.

"Ye may gang before the Coort o' Session, and tak' a remit to the Commissaries, upon finding caution *judicio sisti*," remarked the Scot; "and ye'll hae to gie in defences against a sma' action at my instance for wrongous imprisonment, and detention o' ma person, forbye an action o' repetition as ma wife's *curator bonis*. I presume now we're free to gang. Diana, ma pet, dicht yer e'en and pit on yer bannet, and we'll toddle cantily hame."

"Yes, dear Endymion," said the sobbing Cynthia.

"Endymion! awa' wi' yer havers. Can ye no ca' me by my richt name, Tavish Mactavish?—an ancient family, gentlemen, and weel kent at the back o' Breadalbane. Sae gude mornin' to ye. Maister Mercury, an' ye would keep yer head oot o' the rape o' the law, just take us back to whaur ye fand us."

"Best thing you can do, my lad," remarked Rhadamanthus, in reply to an appealing look from the herald, who accordingly mounted and drove off.

"I'm a wretched man," said Jupiter.

"Here's a go!" roared Pollux, rushing hastily into the presence; "Flora has bolted with Apollo."

Hercules entered, foaming at the mouth. "Justice, Almighty Jupiter! My wife Hebe is off with that villain Ganymede."

"Father of Gods and men," cried the gouty Vulcan, limping up, "Venus, my abandoned wife, has just eloped with Hesperus."

"Go to the Court of Session and the Commissaries, gentlemen," said Jupiter, with desperate calmness.

"O lord! O lord! here's an awful dispensation," said Pluto, staggering in. "Jupiter, my dear brother, that wretch Ixion!"

"What next?" said Jupiter. "Out with it."

"That sacrilegious monster Ixion has carried off your Imperial consort!"

"Heaven be praised!" cried Jupiter, dashing his wig among the stars, "that's the best news I've heard for many a day. Gentlemen all—least said is soonest mended. Bacchus, order out the drink. 'Fore George! we'll have a night of it; and tomorrow we can all go to the Commissaries together."

MY FIRST SPEC IN THE BIGGLESWADES.

May 1845.

My uncle, Scipio Dodger, was one of the most extraordinary men of the age. Figure to yourself a short, stout, and rather pot-bellied individual, with keen eyes moving in a perpetual twinkle, a mouth marked at the corners with innumerable tiny wrinkles, hair of the shortest and most furzy white, scant at the front, but gathered behind into a pigtail about the size of a cigar, and you have a fair full-length portrait of my avuncular relative. My father in early years had married an American lady—I must own it—a Pennsylvanian, and uncle Scipio was her brother. I was the only fruit of that union, and at an early age was left an orphan in circumstances of sufficient embarrassment. A mere accident saved me from being shipped off to America like a parcel of cotton goods. Uncle Scip, who was left my guardian, had some transactions which required his personal attendance at Liverpool. He set foot for the first time on the old country—calculated that it was an almighty fine location—guessed that a spry hand might do a good streak of business there—and, in short, finally repudiated America as coolly as America has since repudiated her engagements. He would settle down to no fixed trade or profession; but as he possessed a considerable capital, he entered into the field of speculation. Never, perhaps, was there a man better qualified by nature for success in that usually dangerous game. His powers and readiness of calculation were unequalled; his information quite startling, from its extent and accuracy; his foresight, a gift like prophecy. I verily believe he never lost

a single shilling in any one of the numerous schemes in which he was engaged; what he made I have private reasons for keeping to myself. If the apostolic order against taking scrip is to be considered in a literal sense, Scipio was a frightful defaulter. He scampered out of one railway into another like a rabbit perambulating a warren, and was the wonder of the brokers and the glory of the Stock Exchange. Men perverted his Roman prefix, and knew him solely by the endearing appellation of Old Scripio.

To me, who was his only living relative, Mr Dodger supplied the place of a parent. He placed me at school and college, gave me as good an education and liberal allowance as I required, and came down regularly once a-year to Scotland, to see how I was getting on. Scripio, though he never failed to taunt the Scotch with their poverty, was in reality very partial to that nation; he had a high opinion of their 'cuteness and reputation for driving a good bargain, and—somewhat incongruously, for he was a thorough democrat—piqued himself on his connection with my family, which was old enough in all conscience, but as poor, in my particular case, as if I had been the lineal descendant of Lazarus. In fact, all my patrimony was the sum of a thousand pounds, firmly secured over land, and not available until I came of age—a circumstance which frequently elicited tornadoes of wrath from uncle Dodger, who swore that if he had got the management of it he could have multiplied it tenfold. Subsequent events have convinced me that he was perfectly right.

Be that as it may, I was ultimately called to the Scottish bar, and entered upon my profession with the same zeal, promptitude, and success which are exhibited by and attend three-fourths of the unhappy young gentlemen who select that school of jurisprudence. I appeared punctually in the Parliament House at nine, cravated, wigged, and gowned to a nicety; took my prescribed exercise, of at least ten miles *per diem*, on the boards; talked scandal with my brethren (when we could get it), and invented execrable jokes; lounged at stove and library; wrote lampoons against the seniors; and, in short, went through the whole curriculum expected from a rising votary of Themis.

I followed the law diligently, but, somehow or other, I could never overtake it. The agents in Edinburgh must be a remarkably slow set, for they never would appreciate my merits. At the close of two years, a decree in absence and a claim in a multiplepoinding remained the sole trophies of my legal renown.

One day I was surprised in my study by a visit from uncle Scripio, who had just arrived from Liverpool. I was reading a novel (none of Justinian's) at the moment, and hastily shoved it into my desk. After the usual congratulations were over, the aged file took a rapid survey of the apartment, which fortunately was in tolerable order, glanced curiously at a pile of legal papers, procured—shall I confess it?—from my friend Cotton, the eminent tobacconist of Princes Street, uttered a hem, in which incredulity seemed mingled with satisfaction, and then, having been supplied with a tumbler of sherry and gingerbeer—a compound which he particularly affected—he commenced the work of inquisition.

"Well, Fred, my boy, how goes it? Slick, eh? Lots of clients coming in, I suppose? You must be driving a pretty smart trade to judge by them 'ere bundles."

"Pretty well," I replied; "when my standing at the bar is considered, I have no great reason to complain."

The old fellow looked at me with so quizzical an expression, that I could hardly play the hypocrite longer.

"I'll trouble you for that packet," he said; and remorselessly clutching a bundle made up with red tape to resemble a process, he took out a written pleading, to which the signature of a counsel, now ten years in the grave, was appended.

"What a devil of a time these lawsuits last!" remarked Mr Dodger, unfolding another document. Worse and worse! It was the juvenile production of a Judge in the Inner-House. I had nothing for it but to make a clean breast.

"The fact is, my dear uncle," said I, "these papers are just part of the furniture of a lawyer's room. It would never do, you know, to have an empty table, if an agent *should* happen to come in; but the real truth of the matter is, that the only agents I know are lads with as little business as myself, who

sometimes look in of an evening to solace themselves with a cigar."

"I knew it, Fred—I knew it!" said Scripio, rubbing his hands, as if he thought it a remarkably good joke; "there are tricks in all trades, my boy, and the American blood will break out. But you can't do for me though, you cunning young villain. Oh no! though you wanted to try it on." And he chuckled as heartily as any of Mr Dickens's characters in the 'Christmas Carol.'

"So you ar'n't making a farthing, Freddy?" he resumed; "I'm glad of it. You'll never grease your coach-wheels here. Where's the thousand pounds that were lent over the Invertumblers estate?"

"Mr Constat, the agent of old M'Alcohol, paid it to me about three months ago," replied I, rather astonished at the question, which seemed to have no connection with the former subject. "I have put it into the National Bank."

"Two per cent? Pshaw—trash!" said my uncle. "Here, look at this," and he thrust a printed paper into my hands.

It was headed, "Prospectus of the Grand Union Bigglesswade, Puddockfield, and Pedlington Railway, in 50,000 shares of £20 each. Deposit £1 on each share." If the line had run through the garden of Eden, supposing that place to have furnished a large passenger traffic besides agricultural produce, with London at one terminus and Pekin at the other, the description could not have been more flattering than that which I perused. Nature seemed to have lavished all her blessings upon Bigglesswade, Puddockfield, and the country thereunto adjacent; in short, I never recollect so flattering a picture, with the solitary exception of one drawn by my friend Frizzle, who had stuck twenty pounds into some railway in a mineral district. "When we recollect," said Bob, in a burst of poetical frenzy, "the enormous population of the district, the softness and geniality of the climate, and the fairy aspect of its scenery—when we think of the varied traffic which now chokes up the ordinary avenues of industry—when we estimate the inexhaustible beds of ore and minerals, absolutely heaving themselves from the ground, as though to entreat the aid of man in adapting them to their proper

destination,—when we consider all these things, I say, and finally combine them together, fancy closes her astonished eyes, and even imagination swoons!" I will not say that the writer of the Biggleswade prospectus was as soaring a genius as Bob; but he was quite enough of a Claude to seduce the investing public. I forget what amount of return he promised, but it was something hitherto unheard of, and my mouth watered as I read.

"That's the spec!" said my uncle Dodger. "Sit down and write me an order for your thousand."

"Eh, uncle—for the whole?" said I, somewhat aghast.

"Every sixpence. There—that will do," and Mr Dodger disappeared with the cheque.

To say the truth, I was not quite pleased with this proceeding; for although I had confidence in my uncle's sagacity, it was decidedly a serious thing to hazard one's whole patrimony on a speculation which might, so far as I knew, be as visionary as the Aërial Machine. However, my constitutional carelessness very speedily relieved me of all anxiety. I went out to balls and steeplechases as formerly, attended the House *pro formâ* in the mornings, and messed three times a-week with the cavalry at Piershill. The pace, indeed, was rather rapid, but then I had a strong constitution.

For three or four weeks I saw little of my respected uncle. He had—heaven knows how—got himself affiliated to one of the clubs, and sat half the day in the reading-room, poring over the Railway Journals and the Money-market article in the 'Times.' He played whist of an evening on a system peculiar to himself, and levied a very fair contribution from the pockets of certain country gentlemen, who piqued themselves on understanding the antiquated tactics of Major A., but never had the fortune before to measure trumps with an American. On the whole, he appeared remarkably comfortable and contented.

One morning I was honoured with an early domiciliary visit. "Fred," said my uncle, "put up half-a-dozen shirts and a tooth-brush. We start for Liverpool this evening."

"This evening!" said I, in amazement. "Impossible, my dear sir! Only reflect—the Session is not over yet, and what would become of my business if I were to levant without notice?"

"I'll insure all your losses for a sovereign. Tell them you've got business elsewhere: I daresay a good many of the old hands are up to that trick already."

"But my engagements," persisted I. "There's Mrs M'Crinoline's ball on Tuesday, and Lady M'Loup's the week after—really, uncle, I don't see how I can possibly get away."

"Do you wish to make your fortune, sir?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then do as I bid you. Get up and shave, and in the mean time I'll look after breakfast."

There was nothing for it but obedience, so I rose and polished my outer man. Mr Scripio was apparently in high feather and digestion. He put the finishing-stroke to what had once been a prize mutton ham, and dug as diligently into a pot of marmalade as though he expected to find a layer of doubloons at the bottom. To my amazement, he dedicated his last cup of coffee as a special bumper to the health of the Noble President of the Board of Trade.

"What's in the wind now?" thought I. "Uncle, have you anything dependent before Parliament? Perhaps you want a junior counsel for a bill."

"Confound Parliament!" said the irreverent Columbian; "I don't care a cent more for it than I do for Congress. The Board of Trade's the thing for my money! That's your constitutional tribunal—close-fitting boxes and Bramah locks—no humbug there! 'Zooks, won't we smash old Jobson after all!" and Scripio neighed like a Shetland pony at its first introduction to oats, all the while helping himself to a caulker of genuine Glenlivet.

We set off in the afternoon accordingly, and next morning arrived at Liverpool. Our stay there was very short. I was led captive to the Exchange, and hurried into a stockbroker's office in an obscure alley behind. The Plutus of this den, an old bald-pated gentleman in a blue coat and drab terminations, started up from his seat as we entered, with more manifestations of respect than would have welcomed the avatar of the Cham of Tartary. Two consumptive clerks looked up with awe as they heard their master pronounce the venerated name of

Dodger. It was clear that my uncle was well known and appreciated here—his mere patronymic acted as a species of talisman.

We were conducted into an inner sanctum, where, having nothing else to do, I betook myself to the study of a map of England, where lines of railway already laid down in black, and projected ones in red, intersected the surface as closely as veins and arteries in an anatomical preparation. Meantime the two seniors entered into a deep and apparently interesting conversation, the purport of which I did not very clearly understand.

"How's Dovers?" asked my uncle.

"Up. Forty to forty-two ex div.," replied the broker.

"Sell sixty. Bumpton Watfords?"

"Rather better this morning."

"Good!" said Scripio, evidently gratified by the amendment of the interesting convalescent. "What's doing in the Slushpool Docks?"

"Heavy," replied the broker. "There's been a forced sale or two, but they won't go up."

"I should think not," said Scripio. "Have you bought me these forty Jamaicas?"

I started at the prodigality of the order. "Heaven and earth!" thought I, "can this uncle of mine be a kind of occidental Aladdin? After this, I should not be surprised to hear him bid for Texas and the Oregon territory!"

"I've got them," said the broker, quietly; "they are going up without steam. Have you got any Biggleswades?"

"Yes," said my uncle; "what about them? No screw loose, eh? Sure to pass the standing orders, I hope?"

"All right," said the broker; "hold for the bill, and you'll make a good thing of it."

"Well, then," said my uncle, "that's all, and we're off. I'll write you from London about other matters. Good-day," and we sallied into the street.

"Fred, you dog!" said Mr Dodger, in high glee, "you've put your teeth into it this time."

"Into what, sir?" asked I, very innocently. "If you mean luncheon, I'm sure I should have no objection."

"Oh, come, none of that humbug! I mean the Biggleswades. There hasn't been such a catch in Britain since the opening of the Coalhill Junction."

"I'm devilish glad to hear it," said I, with a vague kind of general impression that I was going to make money, though I could not well tell how, and a fixed determination, since I *had* got my teeth in, to take as large a bite as possible, though, with regard to the process of mastication, I was just as ignorant as a baby. That afternoon we set off for Wales, and next day arrived at one of the most extraordinary households, in the southern extremity of the principality, which it ever was my fortune to visit.

The house was large and spacious, indeed a masterpiece of architecture, and probably had been built in the time of Charles II. It stood upon the slope of a hill, and immediately below were a succession of terraces, with walks of smooth green turf and exotic shrubs, which in summer must be most luxuriant. It was winter when I visited at Mervyn Hall, but even then the terraces were beautiful. Every tree and spray was coated with armour of clear crystalline ice, except the thick old yew-hedge at the bottom, which kept its coat of dark perennial green. The Hall commanded the prospect of a large and fertile valley, diversified by wood and domain, tower and village spire; and in more than one place, a pillar of smoke, curling lazily upwards, marked the situation of a famous forge or foundry. It was, in fact, one of the great iron districts, though you scarcely could have believed so by day; but at night fire after fire seemed to burst out all down the reach of the valley, and probably years had gone by since the smallest of these was quenched. It is not often that nature lavishes her beauty and her wealth so prodigally upon the self-same spot.

Uncle Scripio strode into the house with the air of a proprietor. I am not sure that he had not some interest in the concern, for Mervyn Hall was a kind of mystery to the neighbours. We were shown into a handsome apartment lined with black oak, where a regiment of cavaliers might have dined with both credit and satisfaction; but times had altered, and the banqueting-hall was now put to different uses. On two sofas and

a table lay a pile of maps and plans, sufficient, according to my limited comprehension, for a survey of the whole world. Then there was an ingenious model of a suspension bridge, where a railway of white-painted cord spanned a valley of undulating putty, with a stream in the centre, which bore evident marks of being ravished from a fractured looking-glass. Bundles of thick clumsy sticks—they might be instruments—with brass knobs at the top, like the morgenstern of a Norwegian watchman, were huddled into the corners. There was a grievous hole in the centre of the carpet; and several butt-ends of cigars scattered on the mantelpiece, showed me very clearly that female domination was not acknowledged by the inhabitants of Mervyn Hall.

Our host, Mr Ginger, received us with great cordiality, and a flagon of superior ale. There are worse things under the skirts of Plinlimmon than the ancient *cwrw* of the Cymry. In five minutes the two gentlemen were deep in the discussion of certain disputed gradients, and my jaws were on the very verge of dislocation when uncle Scripio good-naturedly suggested that I might retire to another apartment.

"How many of the lads have you here just now, Ginger? I think Freddy had better step in and make their acquaintance."

Mr Ginger looked rather sour. "There's Gordon and Mackinnon working at the estimates, and William Cutts writing out the notices. I'm afraid they'll be disturbed."

"No fear of that," said I, too glad to make my escape on any terms; and accordingly, without further ceremony, I entered the adjoining study.

Mr Gordon, the senior engineer, was a sinewy-limbed fellow of some three-and-thirty, whose countenance and complexion bore satisfactory evidence of a pure Caledonian extraction. He was considered by his scientific brethren as a kind of engineering Robert the Devil, having performed various feats with the theodolite which were the marvel of the whole fraternity. If any old gentleman was foolish enough to object to a proposed line on account of its traversing his garden or preserve, or invading the sanctity of his pigsties, Gordon was instantly sent for. No sooner were the stars out, as also the lights in the mansion-house, than on the verge of the disputed territory an accurate observer

might have descried something like the glimmer of a glow-worm advancing stealthily forwards. That was Master Gordon, with his lantern, staff, and chain; and before the grey dawn of morning the whole gradients were booked and ready for the most searching inspection of a committee of the House of Commons. It is even alleged that, despite the enmity of a northern thane, this Protean Archimedes surveyed a Highland line with nothing but his leister or salmon-spear, and actually killed three fish whilst ascertaining the practicability of a cutting through a tremendous pass. Be this as it may, he was certainly a clever fellow, and as ugly a customer as a keeper could cope withal before the dew had vanished from the clover. Mackinnon was a quiet-looking lad, with a latent dash of the daredevil; proud of his name and of his genealogy, and maintaining some show of a Highland gentleman's dignity, in a following of three ragged Skye terriers, who yelped incessantly at his heels. Cutts was a grand specimen of the Londoner, redolent of the Fives' Court and Evans's; one of those fellows whom it is very desirable to have on your side in a row, and very unpleasant to encounter if you happen to be particular about the colour and symmetry of your eyes. With these gentlemen I speedily became hand in glove, and the afternoon passed rapidly away. It may be questionable, however, whether the accuracy of the estimates was improved by the introduction of cigars and a pitcher of the Welsh home-brewed.

After dinner, we all got remarkably merry. Mr Dodger related, in his happiest manner, several anecdotes of the way in which he had "flummox'd" old Jobson, his arch-enemy and railway rival; Mr Ginger favoured us with an imitation of a locomotive train, perfect even to the painful intensity of the whistle; and Gordon told, with great gusto, various miraculous adventures, which might have done honour to a Borderer in the good old days of "lifting." Somehow or other, as the evening got on, we became confoundedly national. The Scotch, of course, being the majority, had decidedly the best of it; and the American Scripio and Cambrian Ginger having joined our ranks, we all fell foul of the unfortunate Cutts, and abused everything Anglican as heartily as O'Connell upon the hill of Tara. We soon

succeeded in extorting an admission that the Scots, upon the whole, had rather the best of it at Flodden; and thereupon, and ever thereafter, Mr Cutts was accosted by the endearing epithet of Saxon, presently abbreviated, for the sake of euphony, into Sacks. I don't exactly recollect at what hour we retired to bed.

"Freddy," said my uncle next morning, "I am going off to London with Mr Ginger, and I don't think you could do better than remain where you are. You'd be sure to get into no end of scrapes in town, and I haven't time to be continually bailing you out of Bow Street."

"Very well, sir; just as you please. I daresay I shall manage to make myself quite comfortable here."

"I say, though," remonstrated Mr Ginger, "he'll keep the whole of the lads from their work. Gordon is too fond of fun at any time, and the moment our backs are turned they'll be after some devilry or other. Couldn't your nephew carry a theodolite, and take a few practical lessons in surveying?"

"Lord help you!" said my uncle, "he's as innocent of mensuration as an infant. Can't you spare Cutts?"

"Better than the other two, certainly."

"Well, then, we'll hand over Freddy to him, and let them amuse themselves the best way they can. Cutts, you may do what you like for the next ten days; but remember Gordon and Mackinnon are not to be disturbed on any account. Now, good-bye, and take care of yourselves."

The Saxon and I made ample use of the permission. We established our headquarters at the Saracen in Shrewsbury, and went the pace for some days at a hand-gallop. I can't help laughing, even now, at the consternation into which South Wales was thrown by the reappearance of Rebecca and her daughters, who carried off in one night seven turnpike gates. It was a pity that the London journals should have been at the expense of sending down special correspondents on that occasion, for I can bear personal testimony to the fact that no country could possibly be quieter. Even the tollkeepers appeared to slumber with a tenfold torpedo power. A little incident, however, soon occurred, which completely changed the nature of my occupations.

I went one day to call upon a family who resided some miles from Shrewsbury. It was a visit of ceremony, and I therefore considered it a bore. Cutts, who was no lady's man, preferred waiting for me at a neighbouring publichouse, so I effected my *entrée* alone. I went in a freeman, and came out, two hours afterwards, as complete a bond-slave as ever hoed the sugar-canes of Cupid. A pair of laughing blue eyes, and the prettiest lips in the universe, had undone me. Sweet Mary Morgan! yours was a rapid conquest! and—you need not pinch my ears.

I went down to the inn in that state of pleasing bewilderment which characterises the first stage of the amatory complaint. Cutts had got tired in my absence, and, being rather in a pensive mood, had gone to the churchyard with a quart of beer, where I found him copying the inscriptions on the tombstones.

"What the devil kept you so long?" said the Saxon.

"Hold your tongue, Sacks! I have just seen the prettiest angel! Who on earth can she be? No relation, I dare be sworn, of that fat old rascal Owenson."

"Whew! that's the sort of thing, is it?" quoth Cutts. "What may be the name of the divinity?"

"Mary Morgan."

"What? little Mary! Oh yes! I know her very well," said the Saxon. "She's the daughter of the principal medical man in Shrewsbury; a pompous old blockhead, with twenty thousand pounds and a pigtail. Mary is a sweet little creature; and, between you and me, I rather flatter myself I have made an impression in that quarter. You have no idea how she laughed when I danced the fetter hornpipe at the Jones's."

"Sacks," said I, quietly, "if you dare to mention that young lady's name in connection with yourself again, I shall knock out your brains on the nearest monument. I am perfectly serious. Now listen—how can I get an introduction to the doctor?"

"It won't do, old fellow, if you have a complaint of the chest."

"How so?"

"The phlebotomising Jew swears he won't marry his daughter to any man who is not as rich as himself. But I'll tell you what it is, Fred. You are a confoundedly good fellow, though you

are a descendant of William the Lion, which I consider to be utter gammon, and I don't care if I lend you a helping hand. Miss Morgan is very intimate with Letty Jones, who is a nice larking girl, and understands how to manage her mamma. I'll arrange a quiet tea-party there to-morrow evening, and you may make love as long as you like, provided you don't interfere with supper."

No arrangement could possibly have pleased me better. The Saxon was as good as his word; and after an early dinner, at which I tyrannously curtailed my friend of his usual allowance of liquor, we made our way to the Jonesian habitation.

Cutts, very good-naturedly, took the whole task of amusing the company upon himself. He gave pantomimic representations of T. P. Cooke and Taglioni, sang half-a-dozen songs that are nightly encored at the Surrey side, and finally performed a series of antique statues in his shirt-sleeves. For myself, I was far too agreeably occupied to pay much attention to his masterpiece of "Ajax defying the Lightning." Mary Morgan was prettier and more fascinating than ever, and before supper was announced I had made considerable progress. I saw her home, and made an appointment for next day to visit a ruin in the neighbourhood. Cutts was rewarded for his good behaviour by three extra tumblers of brandy-and-water at the Saracen, and became so affectionate that I had much difficulty in making my escape to bed.

I shall pass over, without descending to minute particulars, the history of the ensuing week. Love-making is always pleasant; certainly more so in summer than in winter, but there is a strange alchemy in the tender passion, which, despite of frost and snow, can endow all nature with the hues and odours of spring. So, at least, it was with me. I met my charmer every day, and at length succeeded in extorting from her lips the only confession, to obtain which the labour of years is but a trifling sacrifice. What a pleasant thing it would be, if in those matters there was nothing more to consult than the inclinations of the parties who are principally concerned! What, in the name of cross-purposes, have parents to do with controlling the affections of their children? Thirty years ago there is not one of

them who would have submitted patiently to the dictation which they now exercise without scruple. I sometimes wonder whether, twenty years after this, I shall continue of the same opinion; but, thank heaven, there is ample time for consideration—poor dear little Jemima is only cutting her teeth.

Mary was quite alive to the difficulties which stood in her way. Old Morgan loved her, it is true; but it was that sort of love which antiquarians and coin-collectors have for their rarest specimens—they cannot bear to see them for a moment in the hands of others. Wealth alone could bribe the doctor to part with his child, and, alas! of that I had little or nothing. True, I might be considered as uncle Dodger's prospective heir; but that esteemed gentleman was as tough as indiarubber, and very nearly as good a life as my own. Professional prospects—ahem! —they might do to talk about in Wales; certainly not in Edinburgh, where few lawyers are accounted prophets.

In this dilemma, I resolved to take sweet counsel with the Saxon, having no one else to apply to. As I had neglected him horribly for the last few days, he was rather sulky, until I gave him to understand that I was in downright earnest. Then you may be sure he brightened up amazingly. There was mischief evidently in the wind.

"That comes of your confounded Scotch education," said Cutts, interrupting a very pretty speech of mine about honourable conduct and disinterested motives. "Who doubts that you are perfectly disinterested? Of course it's the girl, and not the money, you want. She *does* happen to have twenty thousand, but you don't care about that—you would marry her without a shilling, wouldn't you?"

"By the bones of King David the First——"

"That's enough. Don't disturb the repose of the respectable old gentleman—he might not be over happy if he saw his descendant in breeches. The case seems clear enough; I wonder you have a doubt about it. Old Morgan won't give his consent, so there is absolute necessity for a bolt. Leave it all to me. I'll provide a chaise and four, and if the lady has no objection, we can start to-morrow evening. I'll sit behind on the rumble, and shoot the leader if there should be any pursuit. Only mind this,

I don't go unless there is a lady's-maid. Everything must be done with strict regard to decorum."

"Is the lady's-maid also to occupy the rumble?"

"Of course. You wouldn't have her inside, would you? Come now, set about it, like a good fellow. It will be a first-rate lark, and you may command me at an hour's notice."

I confess that I felt very much inclined to adopt the suggestion of the Saxon. Most men, I believe, are averse to elopements as a general principle; but there are always exceptions, as every one discovers when his own wishes are thwarted. I was not destined, however, to offer my hymeneal sacrifice at the shrine of the Gretna Pluto. A letter of mine to Mary, rather amorously worded, found its way into the hands of Doctor Morgan. The usual consequences followed—an explosion of paternal wrath, filial incarceration, and the polite message to myself, that if I ventured to approach the house, it would be at the risk of appropriating the contents of a blunderbuss. My feelings may be easily imagined.

"If you amuse yourself that way with your hair," said my friend and consoler Cutts, "you'll have to buy a wig, and that costs money. Hang it, man, cheer up! We'll do the old boy yet. Mackinnon will be here to-night, and the deuce is in it if three clever fellows like us can't outwit a Welsh apothecary."

I assisted at that evening's conference, which was conducted with due solemnity. We smoked a great deal, after the manner of an Indian war-council, and circulated "the fire-water of the pale-face" rather rapidly. Both my friends were clearly of opinion that our honour was at stake. They vowed that, having gone so far, it was imperative to carry off the lady, and pledged their professional reputation upon a successful issue. Cutts had learned that on the following Friday there was to be a great ball in Shrewsbury; and, through the medium of Letty Jones, he understood that Mary Morgan and her father were to be there. This seemed a golden opportunity. It was finally arranged that I should withdraw myself from the neighbourhood in the mean time, but return on the evening of the ball, and conceal myself in a private apartment of the Saracen, where the ball was to be held. Mackinnon was to attend the ball, and lead Mary to the

supper-room, from which the retreat could be easily effected. Cutts was to remain below, look after the horses, and act as general spy. Nothing more seemed necessary than to make Miss Morgan aware of our plans, which the Saxon undertook to do by agency of his fair and larking friend, who was in perfect ecstasies at the prospect of the coming elopement.

The eventful Friday arrived, and from a solitary bedroom in the third floor of the Saracen I heard the caterwauling of fiddles announce the opening of the ball. I had asked Cutts to take a quiet chop with me upstairs, but that mercurial gentleman positively refused, upon the ground of expediency. Nothing on earth could induce him to leave his post. He was to act the spy, and therefore it was absolutely necessary that he should remain below. All my remonstrances could not prevent him from dining with Mackinnon in the coffee-room, so I was compelled to give him his own way, merely extracting a pledge that for this once he would abstain from unbounded potations. Down went the two gentlemen, and I was left alone to my solitary meditations.

I have read Victor Hugo's 'Dernier Jour d'un Condamné,' but I do not recollect, in the course of my literary researches, having met with any accurate journal of a gentleman's sensations before perpetrating an elopement. It is a thing that could easily be done at a moment's notice, but the case seems very different after the calm contemplation of a week. You begin, then, to calculate the results. Fancy takes a leap beyond the honeymoon, and dim apparitions of bakers' bills and the skeletons of cheap furniture obtrude themselves involuntarily on your view. I lay down on the bed, and tried to sleep until I should receive the appointed signal. For some time it would not do. The nightmare, in the form of a nurse with ponderous twins, sat deliberately down upon my chest, and requested one of them, a hideous red-haired little imp, to kiss its dear papa! At last, however, I succeeded.

In the mean time Messrs Cutts and Mackinnon sat down to their frugal banquet in the coffee-room. A glass of sherry after soup is allowed to the merest anchorite, therefore my friends opined that they could not do less than order a bottle. After

fish, Mackinnon discovered that he was in very low spirits—a dismal foreboding had haunted him all forenoon; and as it clearly would not do to betray any depression in the ball-room, he rather thought that a flask of champagne would alleviate his melancholy symptoms. The Saxon loved his ally too much to interpose any objections, so the cork of the Sillery was started; a jug of ale during dinner, and a pint of port after cheese, were fair and legitimate indulgences; and these being discussed, Cutts proceeded to the stable to look after the horses. All was right; and after an affecting exhortation to the postilions to keep themselves rigidly sober, the Saxon rejoined his friend.

"It is a great relief to my mind, Mackinnon," said Cutts, throwing himself back in his chair, and exposing his feet to the comfortable radiance of the fire, "to think that matters are likely to go on swimmingly. It's a fine frosty starlight night—just the sort of weather you would select for a bolt; and Freddy and his dove will be as comfortable inside the chaise as if they were in cotton."

"Rather cold, though, on the rumble," replied Mackinnon.

"Gad, you're right," said the Saxon. "I say, don't you think, since I'm good-natured enough to expose myself in that way, we might have a bottle of mulled port just by way of fortifier?"

"You're a devilish sensible fellow, Cutts," said Mackinnon; and he rang the bell.

"Won't it be rare fun!" said Sacks, helping himself to a tumbler of the reeking fluid. "Think what a jolly scamper we shall have. The horses' feet ringing like metal as they tear full gallop along the road, and old Morgan in a buggy behind, swearing like an incarnate demon! Mac, here's your good health; you're a capital fellow. Give us a song, old chap! I won't see you again for three weeks at the soonest. My eyes! what a rage Ginger will be in!"

Mackinnon was of a Jacobite family who had rather burned their fingers in the Forty-five, and being also somewhat of a sentimental turn, he invariably became lachrymose over his liquor, and poured out the passion of his soul in lamentations over the fall of the Stuart. Instead, therefore, of favouring Cutts with any congenial ditty from the Coal-hole or Cider-cellar, he

struck up "Drummossie muir, Drummossie day," in a style that would have drawn tears from an Edinburgh ticket-porter. Sacks, without having any distinct idea of the period of history to which the ballad referred, pronounced it to be deuced touching; whereupon Mackinnon commenced a eulogy on the clans in general, and his own sept in particular.

"Ay, that must have been a pleasant fellow," said Cutts, in response to a legend of Mackinnon's concerning a remote progenitor known by the *sobriquet* of Angus with the Bloody Whiskers; "a little too ready with his knife, perhaps, but a lively companion, I daresay, over a joint of his neighbour's beef. 'Pon my soul, it's quite delightful to hear you talk, Mackinnon—as good as reading one of Burns's novels. Just ring the bell, will you, for another jug; and then tell me the story of your great ancestor who killed the Earl of Northumberland."

This adroit stroke of the Saxon, whose thirst in reality was for liquor, not for lore, proved perfectly irresistible. Mackinnon went on lying like a sennachie, and by the time the second jug was emptied both gentlemen were just tottering on the verge of inebriation. The sound of the music in the apartment above first recalled Mackinnon to the sense of his duties.

"I say though, Cutts, I must be off now. I'll bring the girl down to supper, and Freddy will take her off my hands at the door; isn't that the agreement? Faith, though, I'll have a waltz with her first. I hope there's no smell of port-wine about me. It won't do for a ball-room."

"Try a glass of brandy," said Cutts, and he administered the potation. "Now you be off, and I'll keep a sharp look-out below."

The Saxon's ideas of a look-out were rather original. In the first place, he paid a visit to the bar, where the niece of the landlady—a perfect little Hebe—presided, and varied the charms of a flirtation with a modicum of brandy-and-water. He then returned to the coffee-room, in which were two gentlemen who had seceded for a moment from the ball. They were both very accurately dressed, proud of French polish, white cravats, and lemon-coloured gloves, and altogether seemed to consider themselves as the finished D'Orsays of Shrewsbury. A few supercilious looks which they vouchsafed upon Cutts—who, to say the

truth, was no beauty in his shooting-jacket—roused the Saxon lion. Some complimentary expressions passed between the parties, which ended in an offer from Cutts to fight both gentlemen for a five-pound note, or, if they had not so much ready cash, to accommodate them with a thrashing on credit. This proposal was magnanimously declined by the strangers, who edged gradually towards the door. However, nothing but the arrival of several waiters, who recognised from frequent practice the incipient symptoms of a row, could have prevented some little display of pugilistic science. The temper of Cutts was, of course, a little ruffled by the encounter, and in order to restore his mind to its usual equilibrium he treated himself to another soother, and then ascended the stairs to see what I was doing. By that time it was late in the evening.

A tremendous slap on the shoulder roused me from my dreams. I started up, and there, to my amazement, was Cutts sitting upon the bed with a fresh-lighted cigar in his mouth, puffing as vigorously as a locomotive.

"Good heavens, Cutts!" cried I, "what is the matter? I hope nothing has gone wrong? Where's Mary?"

"All right, old fellow," said the Saxon, with a mysterious smile. "We've plenty of time yet for another glass of brandy-and-water."

"Surely, Cutts, you can't have been making a beast of yourself!" and I seized a candle. There could be no doubt of the fact: he was very fearfully disguised.

"That I should have trusted myself in the hands of such a jackass!" was my first exclamation. "Leave the room this moment, sir, or I shall knock you down with a chair; and never let me see your disgusting countenance again."

"Did you apply those epi—epitaphs to me, sir?" said the Saxon, with an abortive attempt to look dignified. "You shall hear from me in the morning. This is an ungrateful world—very! I've been doing all I can for him, keeping all the liquor out of the postilions—and that is my reward! I can't help it," continued Cutts, lapsing into a melodramatic reminiscence of the Adelphi—"so I'll just belay my pipe. Bless my dear eyes—how came the salt water here? Hold hard, old boy—no snivel-

ling!" and he drew the back of his hand across his eyes, as if he was parting from a messmate upon the eve of execution.

"This is intolerable!" I cried. "Get out, sir, or I shall throw you over the window!"

"Like to see you try it," said Cutts, with a Coriolanus air of defiance. I had just enough command over myself to see that a row with the Saxon was worse than useless, as it would effectually destroy my last remaining chance. I therefore changed my plans.

"Mark me, sir. I am going to ring the bell for the waiters, and if you don't choose to relieve me of your presence at once, they shall have my orders to carry you down-stairs. Will you go, sir? No! then take the consequences;" and I rang the bell like a demoniac.

The music stopped in the room below. Cutts, drunk as he was, observed the circumstance; and no sooner were steps heard upon the stairs, in obedience to the tocsin, than he took his departure with the candle. I lay down again till the tumult should subside, when I intended to apprise Mackinnon of the present state of matters.

My appeal to the bell, which was a vigorous one, had produced a marked effect. Several of the company had come to the door of the ball-room, in order to learn the true nature of the alarm; and Cutts on his descent was assailed by vehement inquiries.

"Oh, don't ask me—don't ask me!" said the villain, wringing his hands like a male Antigone. "My poor friend! he's just going! Oh, gentlemen, is there no medical man here to save him?"

"Doctor Morgan! Doctor Morgan!" shouted twenty voices.

"Bless my soul, what's the matter here?" said the doctor, emerging from the ball-room. "Any body taken suddenly ill, eh?"

"Oh, my poor friend!" groaned the traitor.

"Mercy on me! is it so bad as that?" said the doctor; "I must see him immediately. My dear sir, what *is* the matter with your friend?"

"His head, sir—his head!" said Cutts with a sob—"he is quite mad at the present moment. If you go up-stairs to No. 3, you'll find him biting the bed-posts!"

"This must be looked to instantly," said the doctor. "Gentlemen, if I want assistance I shall call for you; but we must use gentle means if possible. Poor young man! No. 3 did you say, sir?" and the doctor ascended the staircase.

"This is an awful thing, Mr Cutts!" said Mrs Hickson, the comely mistress of the house; "is there nothing that would do the poor gentleman any good?"

"I think he'd be a great deal the better of a little brandy-and-water," said Cutts—"the doctor hinted as much just now; and, my dear madam, you had better make two glasses of it, rather stiff, and send them up-stairs by the Boots."

I was startled by the entry of a stranger with a light, who approached the bed with all the stealthiness of a cat.

"Zounds, sir, what do you want here?" cried I, springing up.

"Hush, my dear sir, hush! we must be calm—really we must. It will never do to allow ourselves to be agitated in this way."

"Confound you, sir! what do you mean?"

"Oh, my dear sir! merely a friendly visit, that's all. I would like to have a little quiet chat with you. How is our pulse? Do we feel any pain about the temples?"

"I'll very soon make you feel pain enough somewhere!" cried I, in a towering passion. "If you don't quit my room this moment, you old idiot, by the bones of the Bruce I'll toss you over the stairs!"

"Oh, if that be the case, the sooner we send for a strait-jacket the better!" said the doctor. "But, eh! what! by Jove, it's the young Scotch rascal who was making love to my daughter!"

"Dr Morgan!" I cried. "Upon my honour, sir, I am quite annoyed——"

"Hallo! what's this? We are calm enough now. Answer me directly, sir; are you delirious or not?"

"No more than yourself, doctor."

"This, then, was a concerted trick to make a fool of me!" sputtered the Welsh Esculapius. "But I'll be revenged. I'll have you before a magistrate for this, you villain!"

"Upon my honour, sir, I am perfectly innocent. If you'll only hear me for a single moment——"

"To be exposed before the whole town of Shrewsbury, too! I'll never forgive it!" and the doctor banged out of the room. To his dismay he found himself face to face with Cutts, who, along with the Boots, had been a delighted auditor of the scene.

"How is our patient, doctor?" said the Saxon. "Is our pulse good to-night? Did we take a look at our tongue?"

"Sir, you're a ruffian!" roared the doctor.

"Oh, come—we must be calm; it will never do to discompose ourselves. Take a glass of brandy-and-water, doctor, and we'll drink success to the profession. What! you won't, eh? Well then, Boots, you take one and I'll finish the other. Here is Doctor Morgan's very good health," cried Cutts, advancing to the head of the stairs, "and may he long continue to be an ornament to his profession!"

"Low scoundrel!" cried one of the young gentlemen in lemon-coloured gloves, recognising his former antagonist.

"There's the rest of it for you, my fine fellow," retorted Cutts, and the tumbler whizzed within an inch of Young Shrewsbury's macassared locks.

A rush was made up the staircase by several of the aggravated natives; but Cutts stood at bay like a lion, and threatened instant death to the first person who should approach him. The commotion was at its height when I recognised the voice of Mr Ginger.

"Cutts, is that you? come down this instant, sir!" and the crestfallen Saxon obeyed.

"Freddy, where are you?" cried my uncle.

"Here!"

"A pretty business you two fellows have been making of it!" said Scripio, with wonderful mildness. "But never mind; let them laugh who win. We've done the trick for you!"

"Indeed, uncle! how so?"

"The Biggleswade Bill has passed, and I've sold your shares at nineteen premium."

"Then I have——"

"Exactly twenty thousand pounds."

I felt as if my head were turning round. At that moment I caught a glimpse of Mary leaning on her father's arm. She looked prettier than ever.

"Doctor Morgan," I said, "there has been a mistake here—will you suffer me to explain it?"

"Certainly," said the doctor, in a very mollified tone; "if you will breakfast with me to-morrow morning." Twenty thousand pounds *do* make a difference in a man's position.

"May I come too, doctor?" hiccupped Cutts.

"No, sir; and if you do not wish to be prosecuted, you had better send me a fee to-morrow morning."

"Oh, come!" said old Scripio. "I daresay it was merely a bit of fun. I'll settle the fees, doctor. Put Cutts to bed, and let the rest of us have a bit of supper."

On that day three weeks I married Mary Morgan, and have never taken another share in any railway since. If the reader wishes to know the reason, he may consult the list of present prices.

ADVICE TO AN INTENDING SERIALIST.

NOVEMBER 1846.

A LETTER TO T. SMITH, ESQ., SCENE-PAINTER AND TRAGEDIAN AT THE AMPHITHEATRE.

MY DEAR SMITH,—Your complaint of my unwarrantable detention of the manuscript which, some months ago, you were kind enough to forward for my perusal, is founded upon a total misconception of the nature of my interim employments. I have not, as you somewhat broadly insinuate, been prigging bits of your matchless rhetoric in order to give currency and flavour to my own more maudlin articles. The lemon-peel of Smith has not entered into the composition of any of my literary puddings; neither have I bartered a single fragment of your delectable facetiæ for gold. I return you the precious bundle as safe and undivulged as when it was committed to my custody, and none the worse for the rather extensive journey which it has materially contributed to cheer.

The fact is, that I have been sojourning this summer utterly beyond the reach of posts. To you, whose peculiar vocation it is to cater for the taste of the public, I need hardly remark that novelty is, nowadays, in literature as in everything else, an indispensable requisite for success. People will not endure the iteration of a story, however well it may be told. The same locality palls upon their ears, and that style of wit which, last year, was sufficient to convulse an audience, may, if continued for another session, be branded with the infamy of slang. Even our mutual friend Barry, whose jests are the life of the arena, is

quite aware of this unerring physiological rule. He does not depend upon captivating the galleries for ever by his ingenious conundrum of getting into an empty quart bottle. His inimitable "Be quiet, will ye?" as the exasperated Master of the Ring flicks off an imaginary fly from his motley inexpressibles, is now reserved as a great point for rare and special occasions; and he lays in a new stock of witticisms at the commencement of each campaign, as regularly as you contract for lampblack and ochre when there is an immediate prospect of a grand new military spectacle. The want of attention to this rule has, I fear, operated prejudicially upon the fortunes of our agile acquaintance, Hervio Nano, whom I last saw devouring raw beef in the character of a human Nondescript. Harvey depended too much upon his original popularity as the Gnome Fly, and failed through incessant repetition. The public at length would not stand the appearance of that eternal bluebottle. The sameness of his entomology was wearisome. He should have varied his representations by occasionally assuming the characters of the Spectre Spider, or the Black Tarantula of the Tombs.

Now you must know, that for the last three years I have been making my living exclusively out of the Swedish novels and the Countess Ida von Hahn-Hahn. To Frederike Bremer I owe a prodigious debt of gratitude; for she has saved me the trouble—and it is a prodigious bore—of inventing plots and characters, as I was compelled to do when the Rhine and the Danube were the chosen seats of fiction. For a time the literary plough went merrily through the sward of Sweden; nor can I, with any degree of conscience, complain of the quality of the crop. But, somehow or other, the thing was beginning to grow stale. People lost their relish for the perpetual raspberry jam, tart-making, spinning, and the other processes of domestic kitchen economy which formed our Scandinavian staple; indeed, I had a shrewd suspicion from the first that the market would soon be glutted by the introduction of so much linen and flannel. It is very difficult to keep up a permanent interest in favour of a heroine in homespun, and the storeroom is but a queer locality for the interchange of lovers' sighs. I therefore was not surprised, last spring, to find my publishers somewhat shy of entering into

terms for a new translation of 'Snorra Gorvundstrul; or, The Barmaid of Strundschensvoe,' and, in the true spirit of British enterprise, I resolved to carry my flag elsewhere.

On looking over the map of the world, with the view of selecting a novel field, I was astonished to find that almost every compartment was already occupied by one of our literary brethren. There is in all Europe scarce a diocese left unsung, and, like romance, civilisation is making rapid strides towards both the east and the west. In this dilemma I bethought me of Iceland as a virgin soil. Victor Hugo, it is true, had made some advances towards it in one of his earlier productions; but, if I recollect right, even that daring pioneer of letters did not penetrate beyond Norway, and laid the scene of his stirring narrative somewhere about the wilds of Drontheim. The bold dexterity with which he has transferred the Morgue from Paris to the most arctic city of the world, has always commanded my most entire admiration. It is a stroke of machinery equal to any which you, my dear Smith, have ever introduced into a pantomime; and I question whether it was much surpassed by the transit of the Holy Chapel to Loretto. In like manner I had intended to transport a good deal of ready-made London ware to Iceland; or rather—if that will make my meaning clearer—to take my idea both of the scenery and characters from the Surrey Zoological Gardens, wherein last year I had the privilege of witnessing a superb eruption of Mount Hecla. On more mature reflection, however, I thought it might be as well to take an actual survey of the regions which I intend henceforward to occupy as my own especial domain; and—having, moreover, certain reasons which shall be nameless for a temporary evacuation of the metropolis—I engaged a passage in a northern whaler, and have only just returned after an absence of half a year. Yes, Smith! Incredible as it may appear to you, I have actually been in Iceland, seen Hecla in a state of conflagration; and it was by that lurid light, while my mutton was boiling in the Geyser, that I first unfolded your manuscript, and read the introductory chapters of 'Silas Spavinhitch; or, Rides around the Circus with Widdicomb and Co.'

I trust, therefore, that after this explanation you will discon-

tinue the epithet of "beast," and the corresponding expletives which you have used rather liberally in your last two epistles. When you consider the matter calmly, I think you will admit that you have suffered no very material loss in consequence of the unavoidable delay; and as to the public, I am quite sure that they will devour Silas more greedily about Christmas than if he had made his appearance, all booted and spurred, in the very height of the dog-days. You will also have the opportunity, as your serial is not yet completed, of reflecting upon the justice of the hints which I now venture to offer for your future guidance—hints derived not only from my observation of the works of others, but from some little personal experience in that kind of popular composition; and should you agree with me in any of the views hereinafter expressed, you may perhaps be tempted to act upon them in the revision and completion of your extremely interesting work. First, then, let me say a few words regarding the purpose and the nature of that sort of *feuilleton* which we now denominate the serial.

Do not be alarmed, Smith. I am not going to conglomerate your faculties by any Aristotelian exposition. You are a man of by far too much practical sense to be humbugged by such outworn pedantry, and your own particular purpose in penning Silas is of course most distinctly apparent. You want to sack as many of the public shillings as possible. That is the great motive which lies at the foundation of all literary or general exertion, and the man who does not confess it broadly and openly is an ass. If your study of Fitzball has not been too exclusive, you may perhaps recollect the lines of Byron:—

> "No! when the sons of song descend to trade,
> Their bays are sere, their former laurels fade;
> Let such forego the poet's sacred name,
> Who rack their brains for lucre, not for fame.
> Low may they sink to merited contempt,
> And scorn remunerate the mean attempt!
> Such be their meed, such still the just reward
> Of prostituted muse and hireling bard!"

Now these, although they have passed current in the world for some thirty years, are in reality poor lines, and the sentiment

they intend to inculcate is contemptible. Byron lived long enough to know the value of money, as his correspondence with the late Mr Murray most abundantly testifies—indeed, I question whether any author ever beat him at the art of chaffering. If it be a legitimate matter of reproach against an author that he writes for money, then heaven help the integrity of every profession and trade in this great and enlightened kingdom! What else, in the name of common sense, should he write for? Fame? Thank you! Fame may be all very well in its way, but it butters no parsnips; and if I am to be famous, I would much rather case my renown in fine linen than in filthy dowlas. Let people say what they please, the best criterion of every article is its marketable value, and no man on the face of this earth will work without a reasonable wage.

Your first and great purpose, therefore, is to make money, and to make as much as you can. But then there is another kind of purpose, which, if I were sure you could comprehend me, I should call the intrinsic one, and which must be considered very seriously before you obtrude yourself upon the public. In other words, what is to be the general tendency of your work? "Fun," I think I hear you reply, "and all manner of skylarking." Very good. But then, my dear friend, you must consider that there is a sort of method even in grimacing. There is a gentleman connected with your establishment who is popularly reported to possess the inestimable talent of turning his head inside out. I never saw him perform that cephalic operation, but I have heard it highly spoken of by others who have enjoyed the privilege. But this, it is obvious, though a very admirable and effective incident, could hardly be taken as the groundwork of a five-act play, or even a three-act melodrama; and, in like manner, your fun and skylarking must have something of a positive tendency. I don't mean to insinuate that there is no story in Silas Spavinhitch. He is, if I recollect aright, the younger son of a nobleman, who falls in love—at Astley's, of course—with Signora Estrella di Canterini, the peerless Amazon of the ring. He forsakes his ancestral halls, abjures Parliament, and enlists in the cavalry of the hippodrome. In that gallant and distinguished corps he rises to an unusual rank, utterly eclipses Herr Pferdens-

huf, more commonly known by the title of the Suabian Acrobat, wins the heart of the Signora by taming Centaur, the fierce Arabian stallion, and gains the notice and favour of royalty itself by leaping the Mammoth horse over nineteen consecutive bars. Your manuscript ends at the point where Spavinhitch, having accidentally discovered that the beautiful Canterini is the daughter of Abd-el-Kader by a Sicilian princess, resolves to embark for Africa with the whole chivalry of the Surrey side, and, by driving the French from Algiers, to substantiate his claim upon the Emir for his daughter's hand. Here is incident in plenty; but, to say the truth, I don't quite see my way out of it. Are you going to take history into your own hands, and write in the spirit of prophecy? The experiment is, to say the least of it, dangerous; and, had I been you, I should have preferred an earlier period for my tale, as there obviously could have been no difficulty in making Spavinhitch and his cavaliers take a leading part in the decisive charge at Waterloo.

Your serial, therefore, so far as I can discover, belongs to the military-romantic school, and is intended to command admiration by what we may call a series of scenic effects. I am not much surprised at this. Your experience has lain so much in the line of gorgeous spectacle, and, indeed, you have borne a part in so many of those magnificent tableaux in which blue fire, real cannon, charging squadrons, and the transparency of Britannia, are predominant, that it was hardly to be expected that the current of your ideas would have flowed in a humbler channel. At the same time, you must forgive me for saying that I think the line is a dangerous one. Putting tendency altogether aside, you cannot but recollect that a great many writers have already distinguished themselves by narratives of military adventure. Of these, by far the best and most spirited is Charles Lever. I don't know whether he ever was in the army, or bore the banner of the Enniskillens; but I say deliberately, that he has taken the shine out of all military writers from the days of Julius Cæsar downwards. There is a rollicking buoyancy about his battles which to me is perfectly irresistible. In one chapter you have the lads of the Fighting Fifty-fifth bivouacking under the cork-trees of Spain, with no end of spatchcocks and sherry—

telling numerous anecdotes of their early loves, none the worse because the gentleman is invariably disappointed in his pursuit of the well-jointured widow—or arranging for a speedy duel with that ogre of the army, the saturnine and heavy dragoon. In the next, you have them raging like lions in the very thick of the fight, pouring withering volleys into the shattered columns of the Frenchmen—engaged in single-handed combats with the most famous marshals of the Empire, and not unfrequently leaving marks of their prowess upon the persons of Massena or Murat. Lever, in fact, sticks at nothing. His heroes indiscriminately hob-a-nob with Wellington, or perform somersets at leap-frog over the shoulders of the astounded Buonaparte; and, though somewhat given to miscellaneous flirtation, they all, in the twentieth number, are married to remarkably nice girls, with lots of money and accommodating papas, who die as soon as they are desired. It may be objected to this delightful writer, that he is, if anything, too helterskelter in his narratives; that the officers of the British army do not, as an invariable rule, go into action in a state of *delirium tremens;* and that O'Shaughnessy, in particular, is rather too fond of furbishing up, for the entertainment of the mess, certain stories which have been current for the last fifty years in Tipperary. These, however, are very minor points of criticism, and such as need not interfere with our admiration of this light lancer of literature, who always writes like a true and a high-minded gentleman.

Now, my dear Smith, I must own that I have some fear of your success when opposed to such a competitor. You have not been in the army—that is, the regulars—and I should say that you were more conversant in theory and in practice with firing from platforms than firing in platoons. I have indeed seen you, in the character of Soult, lead several desperate charges across the stage with consummate dramatic effect. Your single combat with Gomersal as Picton was no doubt a masterpiece of its kind; for in the course of it you brought out as many sparks from the blades of your basket-hilts as might have served in the aggregate for a very tolerable illumination. Still I question whether the style of dialogue you indulged in on that occasion is quite the same as that which is current on a modern battle-

field. "Ha! English slave! Yield, or thou diest!" is an apostrophe more appropriate to the middle ages than the present century; and although the patriotism of the answer by your excellent opponent is undeniable, its propriety may be liable to censure. Crossing the stage at four tremendous strides, the glorious Gomersal replied, "Yield, saidst thou? Never! I tell thee, Frenchman, that whilst the broad banner of Britain floats over the regions on which the day-star never sets—while peace and plenty brood like guardian angels over the shores of my own dear native isle—whilst her sons are brave, and her daughters virtuous—whilst the British lion reposes on his shadow in perfect stillness—whilst with thunders from our native oak we quell the floods below—I tell thee, base satellite of a tyrant, that an Englishman never will surrender!" In the applause which followed this declaration, your remark, that several centuries beheld you from the top of a canvass pyramid, was partially lost upon the audience; but to it you went tooth and nail for at least a quarter of an hour; and I must confess that the manner in which you traversed the stage on your left knee, parrying all the while the strokes of your infuriated adversary, was highly creditable to your proficiency in the broadsword and gymnastic exercises.

But all this, Smith, will not enable you to write a military serial. I therefore hope, that on consideration you will abandon the Algiers expedition, and keep Silas in his native island, where, if you will follow my advice, you will find quite enough for him to do in the way of incident and occupation.

Now let us return to the question of tendency. Once upon a time, it was a trite rule by which all romance-writers were guided, that in the *denoûement* of their plots, virtue was invariably rewarded, and vice as invariably punished. This gave a kind of moral tone to their writings, which was not without its effect upon our grandfathers and grandmothers, many of whom were inclined to consider all works of fiction as direct emanations from Beelzebub. The next generation became gradually less nice and scrupulous, demanded more spice in their pottage, and attached less importance to the prominence of an ethical precept. At last we became, strictly speaking, a good deal

blackguardised in our taste. Ruffianism in the middle ages bears about it a stamp of feudality which goes far to disguise its lawlessness, and even to excuse its immorality. When a German knight of the empire sacks and burns some peaceful and unoffending village—when a Bohemian marauder of noble birth bears off some shrieking damsel from her paternal castle, having previously slit the weasand of her brother, and then weds her in a subterranean chapel—or when a roaring red-bearded Highlander drives his dirk into a gauger, or chucks a score of Sassenachs, tied back to back, with a few hundredweight of grauwacke at their heels, into the loch—we think less of the enormity of the deeds than of the disagreeable habits of the times. It does not follow that either German, Bohemian, or Celt, were otherwise bad company or disagreeable companions over a flagon of Rhenish, a roasted boar, or a gallon or so of usquebagh. But when you come to the Newgate Calendar for subjects, I must say that we are getting rather low. I do not know what your feelings upon the subject may be, but I, for one, would certainly hesitate before accepting an invitation to the town residence of Mr Fagin; neither should I feel at all comfortable if required to plant my legs beneath the mahogany in company with Messrs Dodger, Bates, and the rest of their vivacious associates. However fond I may be of female society, Miss Nancy is not quite the sort of person I should fancy to look in upon of an evening about tea-time; and as for Bill Sykes, that infernal dog of his would be quite enough to prevent any advances of intimacy between us. In fact, Smith, although you may think the confession a squeamish one, I am not in the habit of selecting my acquaintance from the inhabitants of St Giles, and on every possible occasion I should eschew accepting their hospitalities.

I have, therefore, little opportunity of judging whether the characters depicted by some of our later serialists are exact copies from nature or the reverse. I have, however, heard several young ladies declare them to be extremely natural, though I confess to have been somewhat puzzled as to their means of accurate information. But I may be allowed *en passant* to remark, that it seems difficult to imagine what kind of pleasure can be derived from the description of a scene, which,

if actually contemplated by the reader, would inspire him with loathing and disgust, or from conversations in which the brutal alternates with the positively obscene. The fetid den of the Jew, the stinking cellar of the thief, the squalid attic of the prostitute, are not haunts for honest men, and the less that we know of them the better. Such places no doubt exist—the more is the pity; but so do dunghills, and a hundred other filthy things, which the imagination shudders at whenever they are forced upon it,—for the man who willingly and deliberately dwells upon such subjects, is, notwithstanding all pretext, in heart and soul a nightman! Don't tell me about close painting after nature. Nature is not always to be painted as she really is. Would you hang up such paintings in your drawing-room? If not, why suffer them in print to lie upon your drawing-room tables? What are Eugene Sue and his English competitors, but coarser and more prurient Ostades?

Oh, but there is a moral in these things! No doubt of it. There is a moral in all sin and misery, as there is in all virtue and happiness. There is a moral everywhere, and the veriest bungler cannot fail to seize it. But is that a reason why the minds of our sons and daughters should be polluted by what is notoriously the nearest thing to contact with absolute vice—namely, vivid and graphic descriptions of it by writers of undenied ability? Did 'Life in London,' or the exploits of Tom, Jerry, and Logic, make the youth of the metropolis more staid, or inspire them with a wholesome horror of dissipation? Did the memoirs of Casanova ever reclaim a rake—the autobiography of David Haggart ever convert an aspiring pickpocket—or the daring feats of Jack Sheppard arrest one candidate for the gallows? These are the major cases; but look at the minor ones. What are the favourite haunts of the heroes in even the most blameless of our serials? Pot-houses—cigariums—green-rooms of theatres—hells—spunging-houses—garrets—and the scullery! Nice and improving all this—isn't it, Smith?—for the young and rising generation! No need now for surreptitious works, entitled 'A Guide to the Larks of London,' or so forth, which used formerly to issue from the virgin press of Holywell Street. Almost any serial will give hints enough to an acute

boy, if he wishes to gain an initiative knowledge of subjects more especially beneath the cognisance of the police. They will at least guide him to the door with the red lamp burning over it, and only one plank betwixt its iniquity and the open street. And all this is for a moral! Heaven knows, Smith, I am no Puritan; but when I think upon the men who now call themselves the lights of the age, and look back upon the past, I am absolutely sick at heart, and could almost wish for a return of the days of Mrs Radcliffe and the Castle of Otranto.

Now, my dear fellow, as I know you to be a thoroughly good-hearted man—not overgiven to liquor, although your estimate of beer is a liberal one—a constant husband, and, moreover, the father of five or six promising olive-branches, I do not for a moment suppose that you are likely to inweave any such tendencies in your tale. You would consider it low to make a prominent character of a scavenger; and although some dozen idiots who call themselves philanthropists would brand you as an aristocrat for entertaining any such opinion, I think you are decidedly in the right. But there is another tendency towards which I suspect you are more likely to incline. You are a bit of a Radical, and, like all men of genius, you pique yourself on elbowing upwards. So far well. The great ladder, or rather staircase, of ambition is open to all of us, and it is fortunately broader than it is high. It is not the least too narrow to prevent any one from approaching it, and after you have taken the first step, there is nothing more than stamina and perseverance required. But then I do not see that it is necessary to be perpetually plucking at the coat-tails, or seizing hold of the ankles of those who are before. Such conduct is quite as indecorous, and indeed ungenerous, as it would be to kick back, and systematically to smite with your heel the unprotected foreheads of your followers. Nor would I be perpetually pitching brickbats upwards, in order to show my own independence; or raising a howl of injustice, because another fellow was [illegible] elevated above me. In the social system, which, [illegible] present, has always stood, and will continue to [illegible] Astley's is forgotten, it is not necessary that e[illegible] commence at the lowest round of the staircase.

fathers and progenitors have secured an advantageous start for many. They have achieved, as the case may be, either rank or fame, or honour, or wealth, or credit—and these possessions they are surely entitled to leave as an inheritance to their offspring. If we want to rise higher in the social scale than they did, we must make exertions for ourselves; if we are indolent, we must be contented to remain where we are, though at imminent risk of descending. But you, I take it for granted, and indeed the most of us who owe little to ancestral enterprise, and are in fact men of the masses, are struggling forward towards one or other of the good things specified above, and no doubt we shall in time attain them. In the meanwhile, however, is it just—nay, is it wise—that we should mar our own expectancies, and depreciate the value of the prizes which we covet, by abusing not only the persons but the position of those above us? How are they to blame? Are they any the worse that they stand, whether adventitiously or not, at a point which we are endeavouring to reach? Am I necessarily a miscreant because I am born rich, and you a martyr because you are poor? I do not quite follow the argument. If there is any one to blame, you will find their names written on the leaves of your own family-tree; but I don't see that on that account you have any right to execrate me or my ancestors.

I am the more anxious to caution you against putting any such rubbish into your pages, because I fear you have contracted some sort of intimacy with a knot of utilitarian ninnyhammers. The last time I had the pleasure of meeting you at the Ducrow's Head, there was a seedy-looking, ill-conditioned fellow seated on your right, who, between his frequent draughts of porter (which you paid for), did nothing but abuse the upper classes as tyrants, fools, and systematical grinders of the poor. I took the liberty, as you may remember, of slightly differing from some of his wholesale positions; whereupon your friend, regarding me with a cadaverous sneer, was pleased to mutter something about a sycophant, the tenor of which I did not precisely comprehend.

Now unless I am shrewdly mistaken, this was one of the men—fellows who are continually bawling to people to rd—who set themselves up for popular teachers, and

maunder about "a oneness of purpose," "intellectual elevation," "aspirations after reality," and suchlike drivel, as though they were absolute Solons, not blockheads of the muddiest water. And I was sorry to observe that you rather seemed to agree with the rusty patriot in some of his most sweeping strictures, and evinced an inclination to adopt his theory of the coming Utopia, which, judging from the odour that pervaded his apostolic person and raiment, must bear a strong resemblance to a modern gin-shop. Now, Smith, this will not do. There may be inequalities in this world, and there may also be injustice; but it is a very great mistake to hold that one-half of the population of these islands is living in profligate ease upon the compulsory labour of the other. I am not going to write a treatise for you upon political economy; but I ask you to reflect for a moment, and you will see how ludicrous is the charge. This style of thinking—or, what is worse, this style of writing—is positively the most mischievous production of the present day. Disguised under the specious aspect of philanthropy, it fosters self-conceit and discontent, robs honest industry of that satisfaction which is its best reward, and, instead of removing, absolutely creates invidious class-distinctions. And I will tell you from what this spirit arises—it is the working of the meanest envy.

There never was a time when talent and genius and ability had so fair a field as now. The power of the press is developed to an extent which almost renders exaggeration impossible, and yet it is still upon the increase. A thousand minds are now at work where a few were formerly employed. We have become a nation of readers and of writers. The rudiments of education, whatever may be said of its higher branches, are generally distributed throughout the masses—so much so, indeed, that without them no man can hope to ascend one step in the social scale. This is a great though an imperfect gain, and, like all such, it has its evils.

Of these not the least is the astounding growth of quackery. It assails us everywhere, and on every side; and, with consummate impudence, it asserts its mission to teach. Look at the shoals of itinerant lecturers which at this moment are swarming through the land. No department of science is too deep, no

political question too abstruse, for their capacity. They have their own theories on the subjects of philosophy and religion—of which theories I shall merely remark, that they differ in many essentials from the standards both of church and college—and these they communicate to their audience with the least possible regard to reservation. Had you ever the pleasure, Smith, of meeting one of these gentlemen amongst the amenities of private life? I have upon various occasions enjoyed that luxury; and, so far as I am capable of judging, the Pericles of the platform appeared to me a coarse-minded, illiterate, and ignorant Cockney, with the manners and effrontery of a bagman. Such are the class of men who affect to regenerate the people with the tongue, and who are listened to even with avidity, because impudence, like charity, can cover a multitude of defects; and thus they stand, like so many sons of Telamon, each secure behind the shelter of his brazen shield. As to the pen-regenerators, they are at least equally numerous. I do not speak of the established press, the respectability and talent of which is undeniable; but of the minor crew, who earn their bread partly by fostering discontent, and partly by pandering to the worst of human passions. The merest whelp who can write a decent paragraph considers himself, nowadays, entitled to assume the airs of an Aristarchus, and will pronounce opinions, *ex cathedrâ*, upon every question, no matter of what importance, for he too is a teacher of the people!

This is the lowest sort of quackery; but there are also higher degrees. Our literature, of what ought to be the better sort, has by no means escaped the infection. In former times, men who devoted themselves to the active pursuit of letters brought to the task not only high talent, but deep and measured thought, and an accumulated fund of acquirement. They studied long before they wrote, and attempted no subject until they had thoroughly and comprehensively mastered its details. But we live under a new system. There is no want of talent, though it be of a rambling and disjointed kind; but we look in vain for marks of the previous study. Our authors deny the necessity or advantage of an apprenticeship, and set up for masters before they have learned the rudiments of their art, and they

dispense altogether with reflection. Few men now think before they write. The consequence is that a great proportion of our modern literature is of the very flimsiest description—vivid, sometimes, and not without sparkles of genuine humour, but so ill constructed as to preclude the possibility of its long existence. No one is entitled to reject models unless he has studied them and detected their faults; but this is considered by far too tedious a process for modern ingenuity. We are thus inundated with a host of clever writers, each relying upon his peculiar and native ability, jesting—for that is the humour of the time—against each other, and all of them forsaking nature, and running deplorably into caricature.

These are the men who make the loudest outcry against the social system, and who appear to be imbued with an intense hatred of the aristocracy, and indeed of every one of our time-honoured institutions. This I know has been denied; but, in proof of my assertion, I appeal to their published works. Read any one of them through, and I ask you if you do not rise from it with a sort of conviction, that you must search for the cardinal virtues solely in the habitations of the poor—that the rich are hard, selfish, griping, and tyrannical—and that the nobility are either fools, spendthrifts, or debauchees? Is it so, as a general rule, in actual life? Far from it. I do not need to be told of the virtue and industry which grace the poor man's lot; for we all feel and know it, and God forbid that it should be otherwise. But we know also that there is as great, if not greater, temptation in the hovel than in the palace, with fewer counteracting effects from education and principle to withstand it; and it is an insult to our understanding to be told, that fortune and station are in effect but other words for tyranny, callousness, and crime.

The fact is, that most of these authors know nothing whatever of the society which they affect to describe, but which in truth they grossly libel. Their starting-point is usually not a high one; but by dint of some talent—in certain cases great—and a vivacity of style, joined with a good deal of drollery and power of bizarre description, they at last gain a portion of the public favour, and become in a manner notables. This is as it should be; and such progress is always honourable. Having arrived

at this point, not without a certain degree of intoxication consequent upon success, our author begins to look about him and to consider his own position—and he finds that position to be both new and anomalous. On the one hand he has become a lion. The newspapers are full of his praises; his works are dramatised at the minor theatres; he is pointed at in the streets, and his publisher is clamorous for copy. At small literary reunions he is the cynosure of all eyes. And so his organ of self-esteem continues to expand day by day, until he fancies himself entitled to a statue near the altar in the Temple of Fame—not very far, perhaps, from those of Shakespeare, of Spenser, or of Scott. One little drop of gall, however, is mingled in the nectar of his cup. He does not receive that consideration which he thinks himself entitled to from the higher classes. Peers do not wait upon him with pressing invitations to their country-seats; nor does he receive any direct intimation of the propriety of presenting himself at Court. This appears to him not only strange, but grossly unfair. He is one of nature's aristocracy—at least so he thinks; and yet he is regarded with indifference by the body of the class aristocrats! Why is this? He knows they have heard of his name; he is convinced that they have read his works, and been mightily tickled thereby; yet how is it that they show no manner of thirst whatever for his society? In vain he lays in scores of apple-green satin waistcoats, florid cravats, and a wilderness of mosaic jewellery—in vain he makes himself conspicuous wherever he can—he is looked at, to be sure, but the right hand of fellowship is withheld. Gradually he becomes savage and indignant. No man knows better than himself that not one scion of the aristocracy could write a serial or a novel at all to be compared to his; and yet Lord John and Lord Frederick—both of them literary men too—do not insist upon walking with him in the streets, and never once offer to introduce him to the bosom of their respective families! Our friend becomes rapidly bilious; is seized with a moral jaundice; and vows that, in his next work, he will do his uttermost to show up that confounded aristocracy. And he keeps his vow.

Now, Smith, to say the least of it, this is remarkably silly conduct, and it argues but little for the intellect and the temper

of the man. It is quite true that the English aristocracy, generally speaking, do not consider themselves bound to associate with every successful candidate for the public favour; but they neither despise him nor rob him of one tittle of his due. The higher classes of society are no more exclusive than the lower. Each circle is formed upon principles peculiar to itself, amongst which are undoubtedly similarity of interest, of position, and of taste; and it is quite right that it should be so. You will understand this more clearly if I bring the case home to yourself. I shall suppose that the success of Silas Spavinhitch is something absolutely triumphant—that it sells by tens and hundreds of thousands, and that the treasury of your publisher is bursting with the accumulated silver. You find yourself, in short, the great literary lion of the day—the intellectual workman who has produced the consummate masterpiece of the age. What, under such circumstances, would be your wisest line of conduct? I should decidedly say, to establish an account at your banker's, enjoy yourself reasonably with your friends, make Mrs Smith and your children as happy as possible, and tackle to another serial without deviating from the tenor of your way. I would not, if I were you, drop old acquaintances, or insist clamorously upon having new ones. I should look upon myself, not as a very great man, but as a very fortunate one; and I would not step an inch from my path to exchange compliments with King or with Kaiser. Don't you think such conduct would be more rational than quarrelling with society because you are not worshipped as a sort of demigod? Is the Duke of Devonshire obliged to ask you to dinner because you are the author of Silas Spavinhitch? Take my word for it, Smith, you would feel excessively uncomfortable if any such invitation came. I think I see you at a ducal table, with an immense fellow in livery behind you, utterly bewildered as to how you should behave yourself, and quite as much astounded as Abon Hassan when hailed by Mesrour, chief of the eunuchs, as the true Commander of the Faithful! How gladly would you not exchange the *soufflés* and *salmis* for a rump-steak and onions in the back-parlour of the Ducrow's Head! Far rather would you be imbibing porter with Widdicomb than drinking Hermitage with

his Grace; and oh!—horror of horrors!—you have capsized something with a French name into the lap of the dowager next you, and your head swims round with a touch of temporary apoplexy, as you observe the snigger on the countenance of the opposite lackey, who, menial as he is, considers himself at bottom quite as much of a gentleman and as conspicuous a public character as yourself.

And—mercy on me!—what would you make of yourself at a ball? You are a good-looking fellow, Smith, and nature has been bountiful to you in calf; but I would not advise you to sport that plum-coloured coat and azure waistcoat of an evening. Believe me, that though you may pass muster in such a garb most creditably on the Surrey side, there are people in Grosvenor Square who will unhesitatingly pronounce you a tiger. And pray, with whom are you going to dance? You confess to yourself, whilst working on those relentless and impracticable kids, that you do not know a single soul in the saloon except the man who brought you there, and he has speedily abandoned you. That staid, haughty-looking lady with the diamonds, is a Countess in her own right, and those two fair girls with the auburn ringlets are her daughters, the flower of the English nobility, and the name they bear is conspicuous in history up to the Conquest. Had you not better walk up to the noble matron, announce yourself as the author of Silas Spavinhitch, and request an introduction to Lady Edith or Lady Maude? You would just as soon consent to swing yourself like Fra Diavolo on the slack rope! And suppose that you were actually introduced to Lady Maude, how would you contrive to amuse her? With anecdotes of the back slums, or the green-room, or the witticisms of medical students? Would you tell her funny stories about the loves of the bagman, or recreations with a migratory giantess in the interior of a provincial caravan? Do you think that, with dulcet prattle of this sort, you could manage to efface the impression made long ago upon her virgin heart by that handsome young guardsman, who is now regarding you with a glance prophetic of a coming flagellation? Surely, you misguided creature, you are not going to expose yourself by dancing? Yes, you are! You once danced

a polka with little Laura Wilkins on the boards at Astley's, and ever since that time you have been labouring under the delusion that you are a consummate Vestris. So you claw your shrinking partner round the waist, and set off, prancing like the pony that performs a pas-seul upon its hinder legs; and after bouncing against several couples in your rash and erratic career, you are arrested by the spur of a dragoon, which rips up your inexpressibles, lacerates your ankle, and stretches you on the broad of your back upon the floor, to the intense and unextinguishable delight of the assembled British aristocracy.

Or, by way of a change, what would you say to go down with your acquaintance, Lord Walter, to Melton? You ride well—that is, upon several horses, with one foot upon the crupper of the first, and the other upon the shoulder of the fourth. But a hunting-field is another matter. I think I see you attempting to assume a light and jaunty air in the saddle; your long towy hair flowing gracefully over the collar of your spotless pink; and the nattiest of conical castors secured by a ribbon upon the head which imagined the tale of Spavinhitch. You have not any very distinct idea of what is going to take place; but you resolve to demean yourself like a man, and cover your confusion with a cigar. The hounds are thrown into cover. There is a yelping and the scouring of many brushes among the furze; a red hairy creature bolts out close beside you, and, with a bray of insane triumph, you commence to canter after him, utterly regardless of the cries of your fellow-sportsmen, entreating you to hold hard. In a couple of minutes more, you are in the middle of the hounds, knocking out the brains of one, crushing the spine of another, and fracturing the legs of a third. A shout of anger rises behind; no matter—on you go. Accidents will happen in the best-regulated hunting-fields—and what business had these stupid brutes to get under your horse's legs? Otherwise, you are undeniably ahead of the field; and won't you show those tiptop fellows how a serialist can go the pace? But your delusion is drawing to an end. There is a clattering of hoofs, and a resonant oath behind you—and smack over your devoted shoulders comes the avenging whip of the huntsman, frantic at the loss of his most favourite hounds, and

execrating you for a clumsy tailor. "Serve him right, Jem! Give it him again!" cries the Master of the Hounds—a very different person from your old friend the Master of the Ring—as the scarlet crowd rushes by; and again and again, with intensest anguish, you writhe beneath the thong wielded by the brawny groom—and, after sufficient chastisement, sneak home to anoint your aching back, and depart, ere the sportsmen return, for your own Paddingtonian domicile.

Now, Smith, are you not convinced that it would be the height of folly to expose yourself to any such unpleasant occurrences? To be sure you are; and yet there are some dozen of men, no better situated than yourself, who would barter their ears for the chance of being made such laughingstocks for life. The innate good sense and fine feeling of the upper classes, prevents these persons from assuming so extremely false and ridiculous a position, and yet this consideration is rewarded by the most foul and malignant abuse. It is high time that these gentlemen should be brought to their senses, and taught the real value of themselves and of their writings. Personally they are objectionable and offensive—relatively they are bores—and, in a literary point of view, they have done much more to lower than to elevate the artistic standard of the age. Their affectation of philanthropy and maudlin sentiment is too shallow to deceive any one who is possessed of the ordinary intellect of a man; and in point of wit and humour, which is their stronghold, the best of them is far inferior to Paul de Kock, whose works are nearly monopolised for perusal by the *flâneurs* and the *grisettes* of Paris.

Take my advice then, and have nothing to say to the earnest and oneness-of-purpose men. They are not only weak but wicked; and they will lead you most lamentably astray. Let us now look a little into your style, which, after all, is a matter of some importance in a serial.

On the whole, I like it. It is nervous, terse, and epigrammatic—a little too high-flown at times; but I was fully prepared for that. What I admire most, however, is your fine feeling of humanity—the instinct, as it were, and dumb life which you manage to extract from inanimate objects as well as from articu-

lately-speaking men. Your very furniture has a kind of automatic life; you can make an old chest of drawers wink waggishly from the corner, and a bootjack in your hands becomes a fellow of infinite fancy. This is all very pleasant and delightful; though I think, upon the whole, you give us a little too much of it, for I cannot fancy myself quite comfortable in a room with every article of the furniture maintaining a sort of espionage upon my doings. Then as to your antiquarianism you are perfect. Your description of "the old deserted stable, with the old rusty harness hanging upon the old decayed nails, so honeycombed, as it were by the tooth of time, that you wondered how they possibly could support the weight; while across the span of an old discoloured stirrup a great spider had thrown his web, and now lay waiting in the middle of it, a great hairy bag of venom, for the approach of some unlucky fly, like a usurer on the watch for a spendthrift,"—that description, I say, almost brought tears to my eyes. The catalogue, also, which you give us of the decayed currycombs all clogged with grease, the shaukless besoms, the worm-eaten corn-chest, and all the other paraphernalia of the desolate stable, is as finely graphic as anything which I ever remember to have read.

But your best scene is the opening one, in which you introduce us to the aërial dwelling of Estrella de Canterini, in Lambeth. I do not wish to flatter you, my dear fellow; but I hold it to be a perfect piece of composition.

It is enough to substantiate your claim—and I am sure the public will coincide with me in this opinion—to a very high place amongst the domestic and sentimental writers of the age. You have, and I think most wisely, undertaken to frame a new code of grammar and of construction for yourself; and the light and airy effect of this happy innovation is conspicuous not only in every page, but in almost every sentence of your work. There is no slipslop here—only a fine, manly disregard of syntax which is infinitely attractive; and I cannot doubt that you are destined to become the founder of a far higher and more enduring school of composition, than that which was approved of and employed by the fathers of our English literature.

Your work will be translated, Smith, into French and Ger-

man, and other European languages. I am sincerely glad of it. It is supposed abroad that a popular author must depict both broadly and minutely the manners of his particular nation—that his sketches of character have reference not only to individuals, but to the idiosyncrasy of the country in which he dwells. Your works, therefore, will be received in the saloons of Paris and Vienna—it may be of St Petersburg—as conveying accurate pictures of our everyday English life; and I need hardly remark how much that impression must tend to elevate our national character in the eyes of an intelligent foreigner. Labouring under old and absurd prejudices, he perhaps at present believes that we are a sober, unmercurial people, given to domestic habits, to the accumulation of wealth, and to our own internal improvements. It is reserved for you, Smith, to couch his visionary eye. You will convince him that a great part of our existence is spent about the doors of theatres, in tap-rooms, pot-houses, and other haunts, which I need not stay to particularise. You will prove to him that the British constitution rests upon no sure foundation, and that it is based upon injustice and tyranny. Above all, he will learn from you the true tone which pervades society, and the altered style of conversation and morals which is universally current among us. In minor things, he will discover, what few authors have taken pains to show, the excessive fondness of our nation for a pure Saxon nomenclature. He will learn that such names as Seymour and Howard and Percy—nay, even our old familiars, Jones and Robinson—are altogether proscribed among us, and that a new race has sprung up in their stead, rejoicing in the euphonious appellations of Tox and Wox, Whibble, Toozle, Whopper, Sniggleshaw, Guzzlerit, Gingerthorpe, Mugswitch, Smungle, Yelkins, Fizgig, Parksnap, Grubsby, Shoutowker, Hogswash, and Quiltirogus. He will also learn that our magistrates, unlike the starched official dignitaries of France, are not ashamed to partake, in the public streets, of tripe with a common workman—and a hundred other little particulars, which throw a vast light into the chinks and crevices of our social system.

I therefore, Smith, have the highest satisfaction in greeting

you, not only as an accomplished author, but as a great national benefactor. Go on, my dear fellow, steadfastly and cheerfully, as you have begun. The glories of our country were all very well in their way, but the subject is a hackneyed one, and it is scarcely worth while to revive it. Be it yours to chronicle the weaknesses and peculiarities of that society which you frequent —no man can do it better. Draw on for ever with the same felicitous pencil. Do not fear to repeat yourself over and over again; to indulge in the same style of one-sided caricature; and to harp upon the same string of pathos so long as it will vibrate pleasantly to the public ear. What we want, after all, is sale, and I am sure that you will not be disappointed. Use these hints as freely as you please, in the composition of that part of Silas Spavinhitch which is not yet completed; and be assured that I have offered them not in an arrogant spirit, but, as some of our friends would say, with an earnest tendency and a serious oneness of purpose. Good-bye, my dear Smith! It is a positive pain to me to break off this letter, but I must conclude. Adieu! and pray, for all our sakes and your own, take care of yourself.

MODERN BIOGRAPHY.

February 1849.

The ancients who lived beyond the reach of the fangs and feelers of the printing-press, had, in one respect, a decided advantage over us unlucky moderns. They were not beset by the terrors of biography. No hideous suspicion that, after he was dead and gone—after the wine had been poured upon the hissing embers of the pyre, and the ashes consigned, by the hands of weeping friends, to the oblivion of the funereal urn—some industrious gossip of his acquaintance would incontinently sit down to the task of laborious compilation and collection of his literary scraps, ever crossed, like a sullen shadow, the imagination of the Greek or the Latin poet. Homer, though Arctinus was his near relative, could unbosom himself without the fear of having his frailties posthumously exposed, or his amours blazoned to the world. Lucius Varius and Plotius Tucca, the literary executors of Virgil, never dreamed of applying to Pollio for the I O U's which he doubtless held in the handwriting of the Mantuan bard, or to Horace for the confidential notes suggestive of Falernian inspiration. Socrates, indeed, has found a liberal reporter in Plato; but this is a pardonable exception. The son of Sophroniscus did not write; and therefore it was incumbent on his pupil to preserve for posterity the fragments of his oral wisdom. The ancient authors rested their reputation upon their published works alone. They knew, what we seem to forget, that the poet, apart from his genius, is but an ordinary man, and, in many cases, has received, along with that gift, a larger share of propensities and weaknesses than his fellow-mortals.

Therefore it was that they insisted upon that right of domestic privacy which is common to us all. The poet, in his public capacity as an author, held himself responsible for what he wrote; but he had no idea of allowing the whole world to walk into his house, open his desk, read his love-letters, and criticise the state of his finances. Had Varius and Tucca acted on the modern system, the ghost of Virgil would have haunted them on their deathbeds. Only think what a legacy might have been ours if these respectable gentlemen had written to Cremona for anecdotes of the poet while at school! No doubt, in some private nook of the old farmhouse at Andes, there were treasured up, through the infinite love of the mother, tablets scratched over with verses, composed by young Master Maro at the precocious age of ten. We may, to a certainty, calculate—for maternal fondness always has been the same, and Virgil was an only child—that, in that emporium, themes upon such topics as "Virtus est sola nobilitas" were religiously treasured, along with other memorials of the dear, dear boy who had gone to college at Naples. Modern Varius would remorselessly have printed these: ancient Tucca was more discreet. Then what say you to the college career? Would it not be a nice thing to have all the squibs and feuds, the rows and racketings of the jovial student preserved to us precisely as they were penned, projected, and perpetrated? Have we not lost a great deal in being defrauded of an account of the manner in which he singed the wig of his drunken old tutor, Parthenius Nicenus, or the scandalously late hours which he kept in company with his especial chums? Then comes the period, darkly hinted at by Donatus, during which he was, somehow or other, connected with the imperial stable; that is, we presume, upon the turf. What would we not give for a sight of Virgil's betting-book! Did he back the field, or did he take the odds on the Emperor's bay mare, Alma Venus Genetrix? How stood he with the legs? What sort of reputation did he maintain in the ring of the Roman Tattersall? Was he ever posted as a defaulter? Tucca! you should have told us this. Then, when sobered down, and in high favour with the court, where is the private correspondence between him and Mæcenas, the President of the Roman Agricul-

tural Society, touching the compilation of the Georgics? The excellent Equestrian, we know, wanted Virgil to construct a poem, such as Thomas Tusser afterwards wrote, under the title of a 'Hondredth Good Points of Husbandrie,' and, doubtless, waxed warm in his letters about draining, manure, and mangel-wurzel. What sacrifice would we not make to place that correspondence in the hands of Henry Stephens! How the author of the 'Book of the Farm' would revel in his exposure of the crude theories of the Minister of the Interior! What a formidable phalanx of facts would he oppose to Mæcenas's misconceptions of guano! Through the sensitive delicacy of his executors, we have lost the record of Virgil's repeated larks with Horace; the pleasant little supper-parties celebrated at the villa of that dissipated rogue Tibullus, have passed from the memory of mankind. We know nothing of the state of his finances, for they have not thought fit to publish his banking-account with the firm of Lollius, Spurœna, and Company. Their duty, as they fondly believed, was fulfilled, when they gave to the world the glorious but unfinished Æneid.

Under the modern system, we constantly ask ourselves whether it is wise to wish for greatness, and whether total oblivion is not preferable to fame with the penalty of exposure annexed. We shudder at the thoughts of putting out a book, not from fear of anything that the critics can do, but lest it should take with the public, and expose us to the dangers of a posthumous biography. Were we to awake some fine morning, and find ourselves famous, our peace of mind would be gone for ever. Mercy on us! what a quantity of foolish letters have we not written during the days of our youth, under the confident impression that, when read, they would be immediately committed to the flames. Madrigals innumerable recur to our memory; and if these were published, there would be no rest for us in the grave! If any misguided critic should say of us, "The works of this author are destined to descend to posterity," our response would be a hollow groan. If convinced that our biography would be attempted, from that hour the friend of our bosom would appear in the light of a base and ignominious spy. How durst we ever unbosom ourselves to him, when, for aught we know, the wretch may be treasuring up

our casual remarks over the fifth tumbler, for immediate registration at home? Constitutionally we are not hard-hearted; but, were we so situated, we own that the intimation of the decease of each early acquaintance would be rather a relief than otherwise. Tom, our intimate fellow-student at college, dies. We may be sorry for the family of Thomas, but we soon wipe away the natural drops, discovering that there is balm in Gilead. We used to write letters to him, detailing minutely our inward emotions at the time we were distractedly in love with Jemima Higginbotham; and Tom, who was always a methodical dog, has no doubt docqueted them as received. Tom's heirs will doubtless be too keen upon the scent of valuables, to care one farthing for rhapsodising: therefore, unless they are sent to the snuff-merchant, or disseminated as autographs, our epistles run a fair chance of perishing by the flames, and one evidence of our weakness is removed. A member of the club meets us in George Street, and with a rueful longitude of countenance, asks us if we have heard of the death of poor Harry? To the eternal disgrace of human nature be it recorded, our heart leaps up within us like a foot-ball, as we hypocritically have recourse to our cambric. Harry knew a great deal too much about our private history just before we joined the Yeomanry, and could have told some stories, little flattering to our posthumous renown.

Are we not right, then, in holding that, under the present system, celebrity is a thing to be eschewed? Why is it that one and all of us are chary of admitting a certain class of Yankees to the privacy of our social hearth? Simply for this reason, that as sure as there are huckleberries in Connecticut, Silas Fixings will take down your whole conversation in black and white, deliberately alter it to suit his private purposes, and Transatlantically retail it as a specimen of your life and opinions. And is it not a still more horrible idea that a Silas may be perpetually watching you in the shape of a pretended friend? If the man would at once declare his intention, you might be comparatively at ease. Even in that case you never could love him more, for the confession implies a disgusting determination of outliving you, or rather a hint that your health is not remarkably robust,

which would irritate the meekest of mankind. But you might be enabled, through a strong effort, to repress the outward exhibition of your wrath; and, if high religious principle should deter you from mixing strychnia or prussic acid with the wine of your volunteering executor, you may at least contrive to blind him by cautiously maintaining your guard. Were we placed in such a trying position, we should utter, before our intending Boswell, nothing save sentiments which might have flowed from the lips of the Venerable Bede. What letters, full of morality and high feeling, would we not indite! Not an invitation to dinner—not an acceptance of a tea and turn-out, but should be flavoured with some wholesome apophthegm. Thus we should strive, through our later correspondence, to efface the memory of the earlier, which it is impossible to recall,—not without a hope that we might throw upon it, if posthumously produced, a tolerable imputation of forgery.

In these times, we repeat, no man of the least mark or likelihood is safe. The waiter with the bandy-legs, who hands round the negus-tray at a blue-stocking coterie, is in all probability a leading contributor to a fifth-rate periodical; and, in a few days after you have been rash enough to accept the insidious beverage, M'Tavish will be correcting the proof of an article in which your appearance and conversation are described. Distrust the gentleman in the plush terminations; he, too, is a penny-a-liner, and keeps a commonplace-book in the pantry. Better give up writing at once than live in such a perpetual state of bondage. What amount of present fame can recompense you for being shown up as a noodle, or worse, to your children's children? Nay, recollect this, that you are implicating your personal, and, perhaps, most innocent friends. Bob accompanies you home from an insurance society dinner, where the champagne has been rather superabundant, and, next morning, you, as a bit of fun, write to the President that the watchman had picked up Bob in a state of helpless inebriety from the kennel. The President, after the manner of the Fogies, duly docquets your note with name and date, and puts it up with a parcel of others, secured by red tape. You die. Your literary executor writes to the President, stating his biographical intentions, and requesting all

documents that may tend to throw light upon your personal history. Preses, in deep ecstasy at the idea of seeing his name in print as the recipient of your epistolary favours, immediately transmits the packet; and the consequence is, that Robert is most unjustly handed down to posterity in the character of a habitual drunkard, although it is a fact that a more abstinent creature never went home to his wife at ten. If you are an author, and your spouse is ailing, don't give the details to your intimate friend, if you would not wish to publish them to the world. Drop all correspondence, if you are wise and have any ambition to stand well in the eyes of the coming generation. Let your conversation be as curt as a Quaker's, and select no one for a friend, unless you have the meanest possible opinion of his capacity. Even in that case you are hardly secure. Perhaps the best mode of combining philanthropy, society, and safety, is to have nobody in the house, save an old woman who is so utterly deaf that you must order your dinner by pantomime.

One mode of escape suggests itself, and we do not hesitate to recommend it. Let every man who underlies the terror of the *peine forte et dure*, compile his own autobiography at the ripe age of forty-five. Few people, in this country, begin to establish a permanent reputation before thirty; and we allow them fifteen years to complete it. Now, supposing your existence should be protracted to seventy, here are clear five-and-twenty years remaining, which may be profitably employed in autobiography, by which means you secure three vast advantages. In the first place, you can deal with your own earlier history as you please, and provide against the subsequent production of inconvenient documents. In the second place, you defeat the intentions of your excellent friend and gossip, who will hardly venture to start his volumes in competition with your own. In the third place, you leave an additional copyright as a legacy to your children, and are not haunted in your last moments by the agonising thought that a stranger in name and blood is preparing to make money by your decease. It is, of course, unnecessary to say one word regarding the general tone of your memoirs. If you cannot contrive to block out such a fancy portrait of your intellectual self as shall throw all others into the shade, you may

walk on fearlessly through life, for your biography never will be attempted. Goethe, the most accomplished literary fox of our age, perfectly understood the value of these maxims, and forestalled his friends, by telling his own story in time. The consequence is, that his memory has escaped unharmed. Little Eckermann, his amanuensis in extreme old age, did indeed contrive to deliver himself of a small Boswellian volume; but this publication, bearing reference merely to the dicta of Goethe at a safe period of life, could not injure the departed poet. The repetition of the early history, and the publication of the early documents, are the points to be especially guarded.

We beg that these remarks may be considered, not as strictures upon any individual example, but as bearing upon the general style of modern biography. This is a gossiping world, in which great men are the exceptions; and when one of these ceases to exist, the public becomes clamorous to learn the whole minutiæ of his private life. This is a depraved taste, and one which ought not to be gratified. The author is to be judged by the works which he voluntarily surrenders to the public, not by the tenor of his private history, which ought not to be irreverently exposed. Thus, in compiling the life of a poet, we maintain that a literary executor has purely a literary function to perform. Out of the mass of materials which he may fortuitously collect, his duty is to select such portions as may illustrate the public doings of the man: he may, without transgressing the boundaries of propriety, inform us of the circumstances which suggested the idea of any particular work, the difficulties which were overcome by the author in the course of its composition, and even exhibit the correspondence relative thereto. These are matters of literary history which we may ask for, and obtain, without any breach of the conventional rules of society. Whatever refers to public life is public, and may be printed: whatever refers solely to domestic existence is private, and ought to be held sacred. A very little reflection, we think, will demonstrate the propriety of this distinction. If we have a dear and valued friend, to whom, in the hours of adversity or of joy, we are wont to communicate the thoughts which lie at the bottom of our soul, we write to him in the full conviction that he will regard these letters as

addressed to himself alone. We do not insult him, nor wrong the holy attributes of friendship so much as to warn him against communicating our thoughts to any one else in the world. We never dream that he will do so, else assuredly those letters never would have been written. If we were to discover that we had so grievously erred as to repose confidence in a person who, the moment he received a letter penned in a paroxysm of emotion and revealing a secret of our existence, was capable of exhibiting it to the circle of his acquaintance, of a surety he should never more be troubled with any of our correspondence. Would any man dare to print such documents during the life of the writer? We need not pause for a reply: there can be but one. And *why* is this? Because these communications bear on their face the stamp of the strictest privacy—because they were addressed to, and meant for the eye of but one human being in the universe—because they betray the emotions of a soul which asks sympathy from a friend, with only less reverence than it implores comfort from its God! Does death, then, free the friend and the confidant from all restraint? If the knowledge that his secret had been divulged, his agonies exposed, his weaknesses surrendered to the vulgar gaze, could have pained the living man—is nothing due to his memory, now that he is laid beneath the turf, now that his voice can never more be raised to upbraid a violated confidence? Many modern biographers, we regret to say, do not appear to be influenced by any such consideration. They never seem to have asked themselves the question—Would my friend, if he had been compiling his own memoirs, have inserted such a letter for publication—does it not refer to a matter eminently private and personal, and never to be communicated to the world? Instead of applying this test, they print everything, and rather plume themselves on their impartiality in suppressing nothing. They thus exhibit the life not only of the author but of the man. Literary and personal history are blended together. The senator is not only exhibited in the House of Commons, but we are courteously invited to attend at the *accouchement* of his wife.

What title has any of us, in the abstract, to write the private history of his next-door neighbour? Be he poet, lawyer, physician, or divine, his private sayings and doings are his property,

not that of a gaping and curious public. No man dares to say to another, "Come, my good fellow! it is full time that the world should know a little about your domestic concerns. I have been keeping a sort of note-book of your proceedings ever since we were at school together, and I intend to make a few pounds by exhibiting you in your true colours. You recollect when you were in love with old Tomnoddy's daughter? I have written a capital account of your interview with her that fine afternoon in the Botanical Gardens! True, she jilted you, and went off with young Heavystern of the Dragoons, but the public won't relish the scene a bit the less on that account. Then I have got some letters of yours from our common friend Fitzjaw. How very hard-up you must have been at the time when you supplicated him for twenty pounds to keep you out of jail! You were rather severe, the other day when I met you at dinner, upon your professional brother Jenkinson; but I daresay that what you said was all very true, so I shall publish that likewise. By the way, how is your wife? She had a lot of money, had she not? At all events people say so, and it is shrewdly surmised that you did not marry her for her beauty. I don't mean to say that *I* think so, but such is the *on dit*, and I have set it down accordingly in my journal. Do, pray, tell me about that quarrel between you and your mother-in-law! Is it true that she threw a joint-stool at your head? How our friends will roar when they see the details in print!" Is the case less flagrant if the manuscript is not sent to press until our neighbour is deposited in his coffin? We cannot perceive the difference. If the feelings of living people are to be taken as a criterion, only one of the domestic actors is removed from the stage of existence. Old Tomnoddy still lives, and may not be abundantly gratified at the fact of his daughter's infidelity and elopement being proclaimed. The intimation of the garden scene, hitherto unknown to Heavystern, may fill his warlike bosom with jealousy, and ultimately occasion a separation. Fitzjaw can hardly complain, but he will be very furious at finding his refusal to accommodate a friend appended to the supplicating letter. Jenkinson is only sorry that the libeller is dead, otherwise he would have treated him to an action in the Jury Court. The widow believes that

she was made a bride solely for the sake of her Californian attractions, and reviles the memory of her spouse. As for the mother-in-law, now gradually dwindling into dotage, her feelings are perhaps of no great consequence to any human being. Nevertheless, when the obnoxious paragraph in the Memoirs is read to her by a shrill female companion, nature makes a temporary rally, her withered frame shakes with agitation, and she finally falls backward in a fit of hopeless paralysis.

Such is a feeble picture of the results that might ensue from private biography, were we all permitted, without reservation, to parade the lives and domestic circumstances of our neighbours to a greedy and gloating world. Not but that, if our neighbour has been a man of sufficient distinction to deserve commemoration, we may gracefully and skilfully narrate all of him that is worth the knowing. We may point to his public actions, expatiate on his achievements, and recount the manner in which he gained his intellectual renown; but further we ought not to go. The confidences of the dead should be as sacred as those of the living. And here we may observe, that there are other parties quite as much to blame as the biographers in question. We allude to the friends of the deceased, who have unscrupulously furnished them with materials. Is it not the fact that in very many cases they have divulged letters which, during the writer's lifetime, they would have withheld from the nearest and dearest of their kindred? In many such letters there occur observations and reflections upon living characters, not written in malice, but still such as were never intended to meet the eyes of the parties criticised; and these are forthwith published, as racy passages, likely to gratify the appetite of a coarse, vulgar, and inordinate curiosity. Even this is not the worst. Survivors may grieve to learn that the friend whom they loved was capable of ridiculing or misrepresenting them in secret, and his memory may suffer in their estimation; but, put the case of detailed private conversations, which are constantly foisted into modern biographies, and we shall immediately discover that the inevitable tendency is to engender dislikes among living parties. Let us suppose that three men, all of them professional authors, meet at a dinner-party. The conversation is very lively, takes a literary turn,

and the three gentlemen, with that sportive freedom which is very common in a society where no treachery is apprehended, pass some rather poignant strictures upon the writings or habits of their contemporaries. One of them either keeps a journal, or is in the habit of writing, for the amusement of a confidential friend at a distance, any literary gossip which may be current, and he commits to paper the heads of the recent dialogue. He dies, and his literary executor immediately pounces upon the document, and, to the confusion of the two living critics, prints it. Every literary brother whom they have noticed is of course their enemy for life.

If, in private society, a snob is discovered retailing conversations, he is forthwith cut without compunction. He reads his detection in the calm, cold scorn of your eye; and, referring to the mirror of his own dim and dirty conscience, beholds the reflection of a hound. The biographer seems to consider himself exempt from such social secrecy. He shelters himself under the plea that the public are so deeply interested, that they must not be deprived of any memorandum, anecdote, or jotting, told, written, or detailed by the gifted subject of their memoirs. Therefore it is not a prudent thing to be familiar with a man of genius. He may not betray your confidence, but you can hardly trust to the tender mercies of his chronicler.

LIGHT LITERATURE FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

OCTOBER 1855.

MOST notable among the drawbacks which attend the literary profession is the extreme jealousy, almost amounting to hatred, manifested by the great body of authors towards those who undertake the duty of reviewing. Converse with any young gentleman who has presented a volume of Spasmody to the public inspection, and you will find him as full of bile against the critics as if he had subsisted solely upon curried oysters since the eve of publication. He denounces them *en masse* as a gang of heartless desperadoes, cold-blooded assassins, mean-spirited stabbers in the dark, malevolent scalp-hunters, ignorant pretenders, shallow boys, arrogant asses, conceited prigs, egregious numskulls, and so forth—protesting, at the same time, with a hollow laugh, that he cares nothing for them or their verdicts, but despises them from the bottom of his soul. From this you conclude, naturally enough, that the poor young fellow has been made the victim of some foul literary conspiracy—that a whole nest of hornets has been buzzing about his ears and stinging him to exasperation—that he has been flayed alive, gibbeted, and quartered, in the most ruthless and savage manner—and that his mental pangs must have been more exquisitely acute than those of "Eléemon who was sold to the demon." Never in your life were you more mistaken. No familiar of the Inquisition has laid hands on his innocent carcass, or proceeded to stretch his limbs on the rack. No midnight murderer has been thirsting for his gore. He has sent copies of his duodecimo to the editors of every conceivable periodical in the United Kingdom; but not one of them has even recognised his existence, much less expressed an opinion

derogatory of his poetical abilities. He is suffering, indeed; but it is simply from the want of notoriety, to achieve which he would, in reality, be glad to undergo any reasonable amount of tomahawking.

After all, in cases of this sort, the critics are the parties who have real ground for complaint; and we can speak most feelingly on the subject, having undergone, at the hands of unnoticed authors, every imaginable species of persecution. Over and over again has the public been assured in these columns that Maga edits herself; and on the title-page of every number there is a distinct intimation that all communications (post paid) must be addressed to William Blackwood and Sons, 45 George Street, Edinburgh, and 37 Paternoster Row, London. After such clear announcements, it appears absolutely amazing that human beings should persist in attributing the editorial functions to those who neither claim nor exercise them; and in poisoning and embittering, by their solicitations and complaints, the lives of lazy contributors, who have seldom the inclination and frequently not the opportunity of revising the proof-sheets of their own articles. We cannot undertake to specify the amount of individual annoyance which may fall to the share of our fellow-labourers in the vineyard of Buchanan; but we can assert with perfect truth, that upon one devoted, but blameless, head, a whole Niagara of literary indignation has been poured. The process usually is as follows:—One morning we receive an unstamped letter, which the servant, contrary to orders, has taken in, referring to a volume which the writer states that he forwarded six weeks previously, and requesting to know when the work is likely to be reviewed. As we never saw the volume, have no intention whatever of reviewing it, and feel deeply aggravated because of the sacrificed twopence, we chuck the communication into the fire, hoping that silence may be deemed a satisfactory reply. But we reckon without our host. A week afterwards another epistle arrives, again unstamped; but this time we are more wary, and the letter is peremptorily refused. Next comes a communication from a fellow who styles himself "an old friend," and a very old friend he must be, for we have not set eyes upon him since we left school, and remember his name solely from the circumstance

that he was the perpetual booby of the class. He canters through a few preliminary compliments and reminiscences, and then comes to "the object of my troubling you at present," which turns out to be a request that you will notice, "for the sake of auld lang syne," the volume published by the man who sent the unstamped letters, and who turns out to be a brother-in-law, cousin, or some other indefinite connection of the affectionate booby. What "auld lang syne" has to do with the matter we cannot exactly perceive; but our heart yearns towards our ancient playmate, who used to take his floggings with such stoical indifference, and we write him a very kind letter, explaining that we have nothing whatever to do with the management of the Magazine, and that we have never set eyes upon the literary production of his friend. The last is an unlucky remark, for, by return of post, we receive a copy of the volume in question—prepaid, however, for our friend the Booby, though somewhat dull of apprehension, is a thorough gentleman in his feelings. We open the book—find that it is, as we expected, rubbish of the worst quality—and fling it aside, trusting to hear no more about the author. Again we are wrong. This time the author writes ostensibly to apologise for his former error, but in reality to inquire whether, now that we are made aware of his connection with the house of Booby, we will not exert our influence with the Messrs Blackwood to get the work noticed. "Perhaps," so writes the unblushing one, "you may be inclined to undertake the task yourself." Assuredly if the book were only three shades less contemptible than it is, we would comply with his wishes, and give him such a clapper-clawing as would send him for a season howling to the wilderness; but we hate needless cruelty, and the imbecility of the creature is his salvation. Therefore we write the iciest of all possible epistles, declining the flattering proposal; and believe that we have at length got rid of the incubus. Not so. We receive a jaunty epistle from Booby, apparently quite delighted with our recognition, expressing a hope that when we come to his part of the country we will pay him a visit and talk over old stories, and then diverging to the subject of the accursed duodecimo and its persevering author, who, Booby assures us, is one of the finest fellows in the universe. "Do write me what you think of his book,"

quoth Booby; "I do not pretend to be a judge of such matters, but I think some parts of it are very clever." Goaded on to desperation, we sit down deliberately, and waste a whole precious morning in explaining to Booby, in no equivocal language, our opinion of the intellect of his friend. That epistle of ours Booby, with exquisite good taste, communicates to the aspirant after literary distinction, who consequently becomes our enemy for life.

Scott, whose knowledge of human nature was scarcely inferior to that possessed by Shakespeare, has admirably brought out this itch for notoriety, in the character of the dwarf, Sir Geoffry Hudson. Rather than not be noticed, the little man would submit to the imputation of impossible crimes; and his self-conceit rose proportionally with the enormity of the charge preferred. With one literary Hudson it might be easy to deal, but it is no joking matter to be molested by scores. Like the detestable Swiss children who infest the fall of the Staubbach, they will not let you alone, even though you would give a tolerable ransom to be freed from their company. They cling to your skirts, follow at your heels, and perform every conceivable manner of antic in order to attract attention; in vain do you alternately resort to the distribution of coppers, and a warning flourish of the horsewhip—the crowd increases and sticks to you with the closeness and tenacity of a swarm of midges, until, driven to desperation, you rush frantically from the valley, registering a vow that no power on earth will induce you again to set foot within precincts so beautiful yet so rife with irritation.

Far be it from us to insinuate that this strong passion for notoriety is peculiar to literary aspirants, or that it is more observable in them than in the followers of regular professions. We never yet knew the briefless lawyer, or the patientless physician, whose want of success was not attributed by themselves and their friends to the heartless neglect of the world; nor do we remember any instance of the kind in which the consummate abilities, erudition, and talents of the would-be practitioners were not assumed as notorious and indisputable facts. Vanity is the one common garment of the whole human race: it cleaves as closely to the frame as the poisoned shirt of Nessus, and tor-

ture unutterable is caused by any attempt to remove it. Our observations, if properly understood, merely go the length of vindicating reviewers from the charges of hard-heartedness, indifference, and cruelty, which have been so often brought against them by unnoticed authors. Not one of these latter seems to imagine it possible that the almost preternatural silence of the critics with regard to his productions can be caused by their insignificance or worthlessness. Delusions of this kind are common, and they are easily accounted for. The gradations of nature are infinite; and however weak may be the intellect of a man, he is pretty sure, in the course of his career, to encounter one or two others who are even less gifted than himself. To them, by a natural law, he appears an oracle of wisdom: they adopt his opinions, repeat his sayings, and, if he ventures into the perilous field of authorship, applaud his writings to the echo. He is the prime star of a very minute constellation—the biggest animalcule in an isolated drop of water. So that when Vespasian Tims, the boast and cynosure of the literary club which holds its weekly meetings at the sign of the Jolly Ogre, has indulged his friends with a private audience of his forthcoming tragedy entitled 'Abdelbuffer, or the Bravo of the Bosphorus,' it is small wonder if the little circlet vibrates with delight, and if Vespasian is assured by more than one devoted satellite that his work will stand comparison with the choicest productions of the Elizabethan era. As a matter of course, Tims would rather "doubt truth to be a liar," than question the propriety of such a verdict; accordingly, after he has committed himself in print, he cannot for the life of him understand the universal apathy and indifference which appears to have pervaded the whole body of the British critics. For hostile notices, of the most truculent kind, our Vespasian is prepared. He knows that he has enemies; for, to use his own beautiful language,—

> "Genius is a flower,
> Which the base market-gardeners of this rank world
> Won't let the sunshine beam on; but they clap
> Shards, broken envy-bottles, hideous hoods
> Of most opaquy and unnatural tint,
> Right on the top on't; and so deem to pale,

By shutting out the bright effulgence of
The locks of Phœbus, that splendiferous
And never-to-be-classed-in-catalogue
Star of the mind——"

Any attempt to put him down he is prepared, like another Antæus, to resist; but he can meet with no antagonist. He has entered the lists, displayed his banner, and blown his trumpet; but not a living soul will vouchsafe him the slightest notice. He is as unfortunate as the knight of the Round Table, who, though constantly on horseback, and in the very midst of a prime preserve of giants, never could fall in with an adventure; and, like that worthy scion of chivalry, he halts before the drawbridge of every castle, and heaps every kind of vituperation upon its inmates, because nobody will take the trouble to sally out and indulge him with the luxury of a drubbing.

Critics, however, are merely men, liable to human infirmity and impulse; and we have known instances in which, when irritated by incessant badgering, they have so far forgot their duty as to allow their temper to overcome their discretion, and have administered a contemptuous shake or so to the clamorous candidate for notoriety. Then—mercy on us—what a yowling ensues! No lady's lapdog could shriek louder, when, after a series of deliberate small insults directed against a mastiff, Jowler makes a spring, and catches the unfortunate pug in his jaws, than does the new-fledged author when the critic is down upon him. The public, who really are in the main good-natured, and who hate to see any man or any animal over-matched, are apt to cry "Shame" upon such occasions, being, of course, in utter ignorance of the previous provocation; and the mangled innocent, who, after all, is more frightened than hurt, is picked up and covered with caresses—which, however, have merely the effect of prolonging the period of his yelping. He *has* been attacked—he *has* been bitten—he *has* excited sympathy; and he is determined that, in so far as in him lies, that sympathy shall not be permitted to abate. So he continues to howl, and disturb the whole neighbourhood, until even his well-wishers pronounce him to be a positive nuisance, and become rather angry with Jowler because he did not finish him at once.

If any of our readers should be at a loss to know what these preliminary remarks portend, we beg to inform them that they are merely in explanation of the title which we have affixed to the present article. The fact is, that, situated as we are, we have no book before us to review; and we are anxious, before the expiry of the legitimate holidays, to deliver ourselves of a sporting article. Were we as unscrupulous as some of our Quarterly brethren, we might have adopted their convenient custom of transferring, from the advertising portion of the 'Times,' the names of any new works which appear to have the slightest relation to the topic in hand, and then compounding an article from ingredients totally different. But, in our estimation, the practice to which we refer is base and cowardly; and, follow it who will, we trust that the columns of Maga may never be stained by such degradation. It is an utter abuse of literature, and an insult to literary men, to string together the titles of some six or seven different works bearing upon the same subject, in order to make a preliminary flourish, and then calmly, in the text, to pass them over as if they were so much waste paper, undeserving either of praise or of censure. Who, in the name of Mumbo-Jumbo, wants to see a book-catalogue in the table of contents of a quarterly review? and yet, what other denomination can be correctly given to the literary bills of fare which our bulky brothers are wont to throw out for our allurement? Why should Mr Mechi's list of cutlery be made the mere handle or apology for a prosy article regarding the manufacture of iron? or a treatise upon Macadamisation be paraded as an excuse for a rickety essay upon mail-coaches? It would be quite as sensible a proceeding to select 'Tooke's Diversions of Purley' as the proper text for a dissertation upon nursery literature.

Our sporting friends, therefore, will understand that we intend no manner of disparagement to recent writers upon wood or water craft, by omitting to specify their names. Some of them, we doubt not, are practical men, and conversant with the subjects they have selected; while it is not irrational, nor even uncharitable, to surmise that others are rank impostors. Be that as it may, we shall summon no parties to the bar; and therefore we hope for once to escape from expostulation or complaint.

The compilation of a really good sporting work is, we suspect, a task of great difficulty, requiring, in the person of the author, the union of many accomplishments. A man may be a first-rate shot, a deadly angler, an admired disposer of a field, or a prime judge of dogs and horses, without being able to commit any of his experiences to paper. Many men who are admirable practitioners in their art either fail in the exposition of its principles, or make that exposition so exceedingly bald as to be devoid of interest. The truth is, that in sporting matters there is not very much to be learned from the perusal of books. Practice and perseverance, combined with a just enthusiasm, are indispensably necessary for the formation of the finished sportsman; and many lessons there are which cannot be imparted through the medium of print or precept. We are aware that, in saying this, we run counter to the prevalent theory of the day, and the opinions of those eminent philosophers and philanthropists who maintain that the only effectual means of educating the masses are by deluging the country with cheap publications, and letting loose a horde of itinerant lecturers. We more than doubt the soundness of that view. No amount of attendance upon lectures on typography will make a man a creditable printer; and heaven forbid that any of us should intrust our persons to the tender mercies and scientific direction of a railway-driver whose means of knowledge were solely derived from the perusal of treatises upon engines. If we heard a stoker descanting learnedly upon the merits of the machine invented by Hiero of Alexandria, we should feel very much inclined to eschew proceeding by the train of which he is so accomplished an ornament; nor would our mind be much more at ease if forced to cross the Pentland Firth during stormy weather, were the helm intrusted to the hands of the most eminent living lecturer upon navigation. Able and perspicuous as are the art-writings of Sir Joshua Reynolds, no man, however attached to art, will become a painter merely through their study; and, notwithstanding all the treatises upon poetry, ancient and modern, which are extant for our perusal, the art is not, at least at the present time, in a thriving or a healthy condition.

In sporting, practice is all in all. We verily believe that no

angler can honestly say that he has ever added the weight of six ounces to his creel in consequence of all the maxims that are laid down by Isaak Walton; and we are quite sure that no marked diminution in the race of wild-fowl followed the revelations of Colonel Hawker. Old Isaak's book, of which no one who is able to appreciate the charm of a simple, manly, and unaffected style can speak otherwise than in terms of love, is a mere pastoral; beautiful indeed as a composition, but useless as an angling treatise. Useless at least, in so far as its precepts are concerned; but not useless from the spirit which it breathes, and the enthusiasm which it has often kindled. Many anglers, who otherwise might never have thrown a line, have confessed that the perusal of Walton was the first incentive which urged them to the water-side; and they have blessed the memory of the good old man who introduced them to a pastime which never palls, and to an enjoyment as keenly relished in age as in early youth. But in angling, there are many gradations. The generic term of angler embraces men of totally opposite temperaments and habits. The placid drowsy citizen who in his punt, with a gallon of beer beside him, beguiles gudgeons at Twickenham or Kingston, claims the same title with the sturdy Gael, who despises angling even for trout, but confines himself to the capture of the salmon. There are those who esteem the conquest of a single pike enough to found a piscatory name—there are others who expect to be known to posterity as the slayers of thumping barbel. And what is there unreasonable in this? But for the boar of Caledon we never should have heard of Meleager; take away the dolphin from Arion, and the poet becomes an empty sound.

Pastoral or no pastoral, we still place the 'Complete Angler' of Walton in the foremost rank of treatises upon the gentle craft, and hail him as the Homer of the streams. Had he been more practical, more fishified, less credulous, and less discursive than he is, it may be that the virtue would have departed from him, and his treatise have lost that charm which has been recognised by many generations. Only once was it our lot to tread on the grassy margin of the Lea—to see in fancy the venerable form of Piscator with his pupil by his side, reclining under the shelter

of an elm, and watching the floats, as the big drops pattered on the leaves above, or made a thousand dimples in the pool—and to cast a line in the waters hallowed by such classic recollections. We wish now that we had left the latter deed undone; for the man who accompanied us, and who called himself, *par excellence*, "the fisherman," put into our hands something which more nearly resembled a staff than a rod, with a line which might have held a porpoise, garnished with a couple of bullets; then, shouldering a hamper, which contained what he denominated "ground-bait," he informed us that we were to fish for barbel. Of course we made no objection. Arriving at a very dirty and drumly pool, our guide, philosopher, and friend—who, by the way, was the ugliest dog we ever had the fortune to set eyes on —opened his wallet, and drew out some balls about the size of oranges, which he stated to be a compound of tallow-greaves, slugs, and cheese! We had heard previously, or read somewhere, that barbel were by no means delicate or particular in their diet, but we really did not suppose that they would have touched anything so ineffably abominable. Howbeit, the filth balls were broken into fragments, and thrown into the hole, which we were assured was the finest cast for barbel in the river—in fact, quite "a favourite lie." We baited the hook with gentles, and pitched the bullets in. We sat for three hours, and smoked four pipes, without even the semblance of a nibble; maintaining all the while a grim silence, which Harpocrates might have envied. Not so our guide, who kept up a perpetual torrent of gabble touching the monsters that he had seen extracted from "that 'ere deep, vich his the primish bit for barbel in them 'ere parts," varied only by personal anecdotes of the Cockneys who were in the habit of resorting to the river, and who, judging from his account, must have been sportive and playful rogues, addicted to all manner of practical jokes, but "real gemmen," in so far as liquor was concerned. At length, when further sufferance would have become a positive sin, we kicked the basket with the tallow-greaves into the river, for the benefit of the fish, if there really were any there—a question regarding which we entertain the gravest doubt; expressed, in unmistakable terms, to the panic-stricken fisherman, our opinion of the piscatory merits of the stream of which he was

the guardian; and, guiltless of barbel's blood, quitted the banks of the lazy Lea, which assuredly we shall not visit again, at least for angling purposes.

Stoddart is an excellent practical guide, and displays, in dealing with his subject, the decision and clearness of a master. His observations are the result of long experience; and even by the best anglers, some of whom are rather crotchety in matters of detail, and wedded to their own systems, he is acknowledged to be a first-rate authority. But Stoddart, though himself a poet of no mean ability, as his capital angling songs do sufficiently testify, has put less of the leaven of poetry than we could have desired into the 'Scottish Angler,' and is technical almost to a fault. We doubt whether any sporting book which does not contain very vivid and graphic sketches can be popnlar in the best sense of the word; for the author who delights us by his enthusiasm and manner of style, will always be preferred to the writer whose object is solely to instruct. And if, as we have already remarked, it is impossible to gain any deep insight into the mysteries of wood or water craft from the mere perusal of books, it follows that books upon these subjects ought to be made as attractive as possible, in order to win new votaries to the science of the sweet Sir Tristrem. Ah, kind Sir Tristrem!—courteous knight—fine forester—lover of ladies, and of all manner of vert and venison! well is it for thee that thou canst not know what a ninnyhammer thou art made to appear in the strains of modern poets! What though thou wert luckless in love, as many a good fellow was before thee, and has been since thy time—is that any reason why thou shouldst be depicted shivering under the attack of a tertian ague, and moaning for the absent Iseult in thy disordered sleep? Cæsars and Alexanders were, like others of the human race, liable to the stroke of disease, and have called piteously on Titinius or Hephæstion for drink; but what eulogist of either hero would select for illustration those moments when he lay with a night-cap drawn over his aching temples, and a pitcher of ptisan by his pillow? Not so, assuredly, Tristrem, would we have depicted thee, had it been our vocation or choice to summon thine eidolon from the thickness of the medieval mist! Not as a brain-sick lazar, ghost-like, wan, and gibbering, shouldst thou have appeared

—but as a free and joyous knight riding through the greenwood, and making holt and thicket ring again with the blast of thy merry bugle—or as a champion of the Table Round, splintering lances in the tilt-yard with Launcelot, Gareth, and Gawaine, before the eyes of King Arthur and Guenever his beloved queen!

Having delivered ourselves of this apostrophe to an eminent early sportsman, let us return to our more immediate gear. We eye our rods, as they stand, a slender sheaf in the corner, with a feeling approaching to melancholy; for the season is now far advanced, and in a few days most of the rivers will be shut up. That circumstance, however, is in itself of little consequence; for the sea-shore still remains open, and there is as good angling in the salt water as in the fresh. This must be, we know, a startling announcement to many, who have been reared in the belief that, below tide-way, the rod and line are useless. Nevertheless, it is a fact that, in the northern counties of Scotland, and more especially in the islands which contain few streams, and those but of insignificant size, it is not only possible, but easy, for a good angler, during the months of September and October, and even later, to fill his basket with splendid trout in the bays. Nay, we are using far too moderate a term; for no basket that angler ever slung at his back could contain one-half of the fish which we have seen taken by a single rod in the course of a few hours. It is quite a mistaken idea to suppose that there is any virtue in fresh water or running streams, which causes migratory fish to rise at the artificial fly, or to seize on the minnow or other natural bait. They bite freely in the sea; and we have repeatedly captured trout from the end of a little pier, at a great distance from any stream, with no other bait than a common limpet. In order to insure success in this kind of fishing, the angler must make himself acquainted with the localities, must study the state of the tides, and must not be anywise particular about wading. He should provide himself with a stout rod and strong tackle; for if the day is a propitious one, he may expect to meet with fish of four, six, or even eight pounds weight, and he has to bring them ashore among patches of the toughest sea-weed. He may use either the fly or the worm; but the latter is the surest bait, and trout will rise at it when they will not look at the feathers and

tinsel. The bait must not be allowed to sink, but the worm should be kept near the surface, and drawn slowly along, very much as if you were fishing with a minnow. The best time to commence is about half an hour before full tide, spring-tides being decidedly preferable, as the trout are then upon the move, and the sport will continue as long as the nature of the bottom will allow. But as the fish go out very fast with the receding waters, it is in most places difficult to reach them after the tide has half ebbed. An excellent station for taking sea-trout is where the tide runs rapidly past a ledge of rocks; indeed, the more current there is, the greater is the chance of success. The ground near the mouth of streams, even though these may be so small as scarcely to make their way through the gravel, is almost always good; but even in bays, where there is neither rock nor stream, excellent sport may be obtained, especially if the wind is blowing freshly from shore. One great advantage of this kind of angling is, that all the fish, without exception, are in prime condition; and, as regards sport, we would at any time as lief angle in a Zetland voe as in a Highland river. You may miss the trees and the mountains; but, on the other hand, there stretches before you, fresh and free, the glorious ocean, with the white comb on every wave, as it rolls toward the barrier-cliffs of the rocky island, and, bursting on that wall of adamant, sends the spray of its surges glittering in the sunbeams, in a rainbow shower, up to the grand old ruined fortress, which, in times of yore, Earl Erlend, for the sake of his bride, made good against the hosts of the Norsemen.

Do you open your eyes in wonderment at this kind of sport, ye sons of the city, whose souls are set upon gudgeon, and whose highest aspirations are after dace? Come, then, with us to the brow of the cliffs, and we will show you greater marvels! Take heed to your footing, for the herbage is short and slippery, the precipice goes down sheer two hundred feet to the water; and, were your heels to fail you now, you would never eat whitebait at the Trafalgar more. But be of good courage—for here the ledge is broad; and it is only a pic-tarnie, and not an eagle, that is circling round your heads with such vehement and threatening screams. Look out seaward, and tell us what you

behold. Gulls of every kind, white, black, and grey, are wheeling round the broken skerry, and adding their distracting clamour to the cries of the tern, auk, and teist; whilst the long-necked cormorants fly sullenly over the face of the deep. Down yonder, on the point of the reef, are some thirty seals—*Neptuni pecus*, the herd that only will obey the winding of the Triton's horn—basking in the sun, flapping their tails as they revel in the unwonted luxury of heat, and nodding their heads as if in acquiescence to the sage remarks of their neighbours. For they are right wise fellows, those seals—more sagacious than many a biped who piques himself upon his superior education—and it would puzzle an acuter youth than ever stood in your shoes to circumvent them. But look out yonder; can you not descry something like white spouts bursting from the water, and occasionally a dark speck rising to the surface and disappearing? Congratulate yourself, child of Whittington; for that is a shoal of whales, and it may be your good fortune to witness the most exciting of all spectacles—a WHALE-HUNT among the northern islands!

Other eyes than ours have lighted upon that most gladsome apparition. On the hill-side stands a frantic woman waving her apron—yea, she has even torn off her petticoat for a more conspicuous banner—and, leaping like a Mœnad, she vociferates, "Whales—whales!" And well may Tronda leap and vociferate; for, if the chase should prove successful, her superior sharpness of vision may win her a five-pound note, besides diffusing comfort over the neighbourhood for miles around. "Whales—whales!" The whole district rises at the cry. The township below vomits forth its inmates by tens and twenties. The fisherman, dozing on the beach with the pipe in his mouth, bounds to his feet as though an adder had stung him, and rushes desperately to his boat. Swarthy men, and weather-bronzed women, their hair streaming in the wind, unconfined by snood or kerchief, start out of peat-mosses, and race violently to the shore. The reaper abandons his sickle, and runs with the rest; for oil is dearer to him than corn; besides, the oats and bere cannot swim away, which is more than can be said of the whales. Horses may take to the hill, and cows make havoc among the

crop, for their appointed guardians are gone;—even the ragged urchin, whose duty it is to herd the geese, has caught the general infection, and, mad as a March hare, gallops after his insane mother, both of them shouting, as if for dear life, "Whales—whales!" though the whole inhabitants of the parish are by this time thoroughly cognisant of the shoal.

Quick—quick! shove off the boats—every one of them, however old and leaky, and tarry not for thwart or rowing-pin, because every minute is precious. "Huzza! here comes the minister!" "Bless you, my bairns!" quoth the good man, as, armed with a flinching-knife, he steps panting into a boat; and the flotilla begins to move. "How many whales may there be?" On this point there is some diversity of opinion, for, large as they are, whales in the sea are not so easily counted as chickens in a farmyard; but nobody thinks there are fewer than four, and some estimate the number at five hundred!

"Five hundred whales!—well, that is coming it rather strong!" Hold your tongue, you ignoramus! and, for the future, confine your remarks to what you know and understand. If we had told you an hour ago that we could show you thirty seals, some of them not much smaller in carcass than a young Highland bullock, lying together upon a rock, you would not have believed us. You have seen that number now; and very much mistaken shall we be, if, on your return to Cheapside, you do not multiply it fourfold. The whales out yonder are not Greenlanders, such as Scoresby has written about so well and oleaginously—they are "ca'ing whales," which the learned style *Delphinus deductor;* and there are huge shoals of them in the northern seas, especially around the Faroe Islands, which pertain to the Crown of Denmark. In those distant islands their appearance at a certain season of the year is confidently expected; and regular preparation is made for the fishing, or rather the chase. Round the British Islands they are not so common; but few years elapse in which they do not show themselves off some part of the coast of Zetland, and they are frequently captured in large numbers. Among the Orkneys they are not often seen, probably owing to the extreme rapidity of the tides in that archipelago; and of late they have been rare visitors. In the bays of Skye and the sea-

lochs of the Lews they are occasionally visible—indeed, we believe that the largest shoal of the past season [1855] came on shore in the latter island.

These fish—for such by immemorial usage we are entitled to term them—often reach the size of twenty or four-and-twenty feet; and their carcasses are extremely valuable on account of the quantity of oil which they produce. Although "whales," according to the law of Scotland, are droits of the Crown, that claim has long since been abandoned as regards the "ca'ing" whale; and the proceeds of a lucky chase are divided in certain proportions, and according to a graduated scale, among the captors, after deducting a certain share for the proprietor of the ground adjacent to the shore where the fish may be stranded. Such at least is the custom in Zetland; and therefore it is not to be wondered at if the apparition of a shoal should be sufficient to throw the inhabitants of the fortunate district into a state of the most violent excitement. For yonder, where the spouts are rising, and the black backs dipping, swim creatures to the marketable value of, it may be, two thousand pounds; and with patience, caution, and perseverance, they may all of them be driven ashore.

Of that little fleet there is no appointed admiral; but, by common consent, Jerome Jeromson, a very patriarchal Triton, who for more than forty years has gone out regularly to the *haaf*, and who has even witnessed and joined in a whale-hunt at Faroe, is installed in the chief command; or, to speak more correctly, assumes it without any murmur. But for him some of the hastier hands would have pushed off without ammunition, thereby committing the same blunder which was perpetrated by that sagacious creature, and bright star of intelligence, Sir Charles Wood, in despatching our fleet to bombard the Baltic fortresses without a relay of mortars. But, fortunately for the Zetlanders, and their chance of spoil and oil, Jeromson, unlike Wood, is thoroughly up to his business, and has taken good care that no boat has been allowed to leave shore without a proper provision of *stones*. Start not again, youth of our adoption, nor insinuate that we mean harpoons. We mean simply what we say, stones—tidy pebbles from the beach, to make, when necessary,

a splashing in the water, and urge the whales onwards to their doom. This is at best but a clumsy substitute for the more regular apparatus employed at Faroe, which consists of ropes extending from boat to boat, to which wisps of straw are tied; and that is said to constitute an impenetrable barrier, at least effectually to prevent the shoal from heading backwards. But we have already explained that the appearance of whales off the coasts of Zetland cannot be relied upon with certainty, and therefore it is no wonder if each township or fishing village should be but scantily provided with the implements appropriate for this occasional chase. After all, stones answer the purpose pretty well, the great matter being to keep up a sufficient splashing; and we dare to say that a Cockney in a cork jacket would be sufficient to terrify the whales. As for harpoons, they are quite out of the question, for the use of them would break the shoal at once, and so destroy the hopes of the fishing.

Pull strong and steady, and keep the line, and above all, in the mean time, keep silence; for we are now at no great distance from the whales, and the first manœuvre is to place the boats between them and the outer ocean. Old Jerome leads the way; and gradually the boats creep round the shoal, and place it between them and the land. So far good; but even yet there must be no noise, for the fish are still in deep water, and if greatly alarmed will inevitably make a rush and escape. Nor is the shore immediately opposite of a kind to render their capture practicable; for it is rocky and broken, and there is no beach upon which whales could be run. But yonder, beyond the point, is the Trows Bay, with a fine marginal sweep of white sand, a fitting race-course for the steeds of Amphitrite; and if we can beguile them thither, our triumph is next to secure.

Though not alarmed, the whales are evidently conscious of the proximity of danger, for they cease their gambols and swim in more compact order, the smallest and weakest being placed nearest to the shore; and one fine old "bull," who probably has been in trouble ere now, leads the van, and occasionally rears his head as if to reconnoitre. There is now no need to enforce silence, for the whales are running fast, and every sinew of the strong fishermen at the oars is strained to keep pace with them.

Hurrah! the point is passed—the white sands of Trows Bay are visible—and the boats rapidly form a semicircle round the shoal.

Now, then, give tongue, and splash with stone and oar, for the "bull" begins to see that he has been led into a natural trap; he swims no longer in front of the shoal, but turns his head toward the boats, and it is evident that he meditates a rush. If he makes his purpose good, and his heart fail him not, farewell to our hope of oil; for the whole herd will follow in his wake; and tough though Norway timber be, it cannot resist the shock of the ocean cavalry. Therefore shout, splash, howl like demons, ye sons and daughters of Hialtland! Chant runes, pitch stones, and roar vociferously like the Berserkars of old, for the moment of battle has come when the voice of the champions should be heard! And heard it is, for never from the heart of a sacked city arose a more discordant cry; and the "bull," fairly cowed, turns tail, and runs himself precipitately ashore. Then what a flurry! what a lashing of tails, and walloping, and snorting, and moaning, as the poor misguided whales recklessly follow their leader, and attempt to escape from their enemies at sea by throwing themselves on the sand! And here let us close the picture. After victory, what boots it describing the horrors of the battle-field? After the excitement of the chase, is not the process of gralloching disgusting? Therefore, having seen the whales stranded, and past the possibility of escape, let us, if you please, leave the captors to despatch them at their leisure, and turn to some other field. Indeed, after such a take as this, the shore in the neighbourhood of Trows Bay will be anything but an agreeable promenade for persons whose olfactory organs are sensitive. It is possible that invalids to whom the use of cod-liver oil has been recommended by the faculty, might derive benefit from inhaling the odours which arise during the subsequent processes of flinching and boiling; but, as our lungs are reasonably sound, we beg to make our bow, and cheerfully surrender our share of the profits for the benefit of the common fund.

Let it not be supposed that scenes, such as that of which we have attempted to give a sketch, are of ordinary occurrence; or

that, when a shoal of whales is discovered, the chances of capture exceed those of loss. The reverse, indeed, is the case. Within a fortnight from the time when we are writing, a considerable shoal appeared in the Bay of Scapa, within two miles of Kirkwall, the capital of Orkney; but though the chase was perseveringly maintained so long as there was hope, it was found impossible to drive them on shore. In 1852, a shoal, computed at the enormous number of eleven hundred, was seen near Scalloway in Zetland; but the result, in that case, was equally unfortunate. Still the chances are great enough to excite the cupidity and arouse the enthusiasm of the fishermen; and few Zetlanders are so stolid and impassible as not to exhibit eloquence, if you can induce them to describe the charms, vicissitudes, and dangers of a whale-hunt.

Some enthusiastic members of Parliament meditate, as we are given to understand, a complete codification of the laws of England—by which we presume they mean, the condensation of all existing and operative statutes in one Brobdignagian Act. We shall not venture, at the present time, to offer any opinion as to the feasibility of that scheme; but we should much rejoice, were it possible, to see the whole science of sporting expounded in a fitting Encyclopedia. Such as do exist are worse than useless; but surely, with so many splendid sporting writers upon various topics as the present age has produced, something might be done towards furnishing us with a creditable code of St Hubert, applicable to the British Isles. Take, for example, the subject of deer-stalking. The Stuarts, Mr Scrope, and Mr St John respectively have written books, which have not only commanded general applause from the fascination of their style, but have been acknowledged by sportsmen of the highest accomplishments as noble works of strategy. Colquhoun's book—'The Moor and the Loch'—is, in our opinion, one of the very best sporting works that ever was compiled; inasmuch as it is eminently practical, while entrancing the reader with the vitality and power of its descriptions. Scrope, though good upon deer, is bad upon salmon—at least to any real purpose—and, for a first-rate "kettle of fish," he must needs succumb to Stoddart. In the chase there has been a decided hiatus since "Nimrod" was called away; still, there is

ample material, from his writings and those of others who may not have achieved the same degree of notoriety, for maintaining the honour of "the brush." Probably, however, a long time must elapse before what we contemplate could be realised; and it is not impossible that the realisation might, when attained, be in many respects mere matter of history. For, in the north, so rapid are the changes, that each succeeding year makes a marked difference both on the sporting grounds and on the streams. The former are becoming more circumscribed; and as cultivation increases, there is a change in the character of the fauna. Within our own recollection, many streams, once famous for the sport they afforded to the angler, have become comparatively barren, owing, as we think, to the system of drainage, which renders the floods more heavy and impetuous than they were before, and in dry seasons cuts off the supply of water which was previously yielded by the mosses. Some birds and wild animals have become very scarce. The haunts of the eagles have been thinned; and rarely now, except in the remotest districts, can you hear the scream of the king of birds as he swoops down upon his quarry. The capercailzie, though lately restored from Norway, was extinct for nearly a century; and in the south, as we are informed, the breed of bustards exists no longer. If the story which was once told to us by an English sportsman be true, ignominious was the termination of that noble race of birds. For many years the numbers of the bustards had been declining, and they had disappeared from one locality after another, until it was supposed that only three were left. These were known to frequent one of the large downs in the south of England; and as the plain was a wide one, and not likely to be broken up by cultivation, it was still hoped that the birds might multiply. But one day there arrived, on a visit to the lord of the manor, a London tradesman—we believe a drysalter by profession—who happened to possess that sort of influence over his host which is often the result of pecuniary accommodation. Now, Stigginson, like Mr Winkle, had the soul of a sportsman, and he yearned to perform some exploit in the fields which might entitle him to claim the admiration of his less fortunate friends in the City. The only drawback to his ambition was that, though well ad-

vanced in years, Stigginson had never handled a gun; and, in consequence, his notions upon the subject of projectiles were somewhat hazy and indefinite. But the drysalter was a man of courage, and knew full well that the only way to conquer difficulties was to face them; so when his host offered him some shooting, he eagerly accepted, and went forth to the stubbles and potato-fields to wage war with the partridges. The birds were numerous, and not wild; but that day fortune did not smile upon Stigginson. Blood, indeed, he shed; but the blood was that of an unfortunate pointer, who, standing dead at point, thirty yards off, received in his rump a charge of No. 5 from the barrel of Stigginson's gun, which, as he protested to the keeper, had exploded of its own accord; and the poor brute limped home yowling to his kennel. Next morning, on being ordered to proceed to the fields in charge of the aspiring neophyte, the keeper sternly refused to budge a single step, and had the insolence to state to the squire that, though he was a keeper, he was also a Christian man, with a wife and five children depending upon him for support; and he would not stand the extreme risk of being shot dead upon the spot, or rendered, like poor Ponto, a cripple for life, to gratify any Cockney, even were he an alderman of London. It was of no use showing the gentleman where the birds were, for he could not hit one, were it to sit up stuffed before him as a mark; and as for carrying the bag, surely Mr Stigginson's own man was quite competent for that duty—besides, the exercise would do him good. As Sykes the gamekeeper was a valuable servant, and, moreover, had reason on his side, the squire was compelled to yield, and Stigginson and his man went forth together. Ignorant of the country, they proceeded right across the cultivated fields, without any notable result, and at last reached the open ground. In the futile expectation of finding a hare, they walked some distance over the downs, and at length, in the heat of the day, lay down in a gravel-pit to enjoy their luncheon. Then and there Stigginson began to bewail his ill-luck, which his servant, who had once, in the days of his youth, been employed to shoot crows, attributed entirely to the over-fineness of his ammunition. "For," said he, "if you fires at a feather pillow with them 'ere little drops, you'll find they

won't go through; and it stands to reason that they won't do no harm to a bird, vich also is all feathers, or mostly. I knows what shooting is; and I never see any real work done with shot as is less than peas." In consequence of this remark, which appeared to him to throw a totally new light upon the subject, and satisfactorily to account for the failures of the previous day, the drysalter, without drawing his charge, rammed into each barrel a cartridge intended for shooting wild-fowl at a long range. Not ten minutes afterwards a whirring of wings was heard; and there, sure enough, over the quarry, with a slow and deliberate flight, came an enormous bird, which, to the diseased imagination of the drysalter, appeared larger than the roc of the Arabian Tales. "Fire!" roared his man; and Stigginson, shutting both his eyes, fired both barrels, and rolled over from the recoil. But he fell not alone; for down, with a violent thump upon the sward, came the bird that he had aimed at. It was a memorable shot, for it took the life of the last cock-bustard in England!

Foxes, were they not preserved for the purposes of the chase, would very soon become extinct in Britain, like their more ferocious cousins the wolves; indeed, the hill-foxes, as well as the genuine wild-cat, are now very rare. On the other hand, Alpine or white hares are fast increasing in some districts, and afford excellent sport in high grass-fields and enclosures. Somehow or other, seals are not so plentiful as they once were around the Scottish coasts, though they are still to be found in large numbers about the islands. We do not attribute their diminution so much to the exertions of regular sportsmen—though to secure a seal is reckoned no contemptible feat—as to the deadly hostility with which they are pursued by the owners of salmon-fisheries, to whose nets and tackle they do an infinite deal of damage. The appetite of the seal for salmon is something perfectly uncontrollable; and he is so far from being a fair fisher, that he plunders without any scruple. He will even force his way into the nets for the purpose of taking out salmon; and if he could effect this delicately and cleanly, there would be comparatively little ground for complaint; but he rends the net to pieces with his strong, sharp claws, and facilitates the escape of many more fish than he actually carries away. Therefore he is

looked upon as an enemy entitled to no law or quarter, and is shot down and knocked upon the head without mercy; even poison has been resorted to as an effectual means of destruction. For our own part, as we do not happen to have any pecuniary interest in salmon-fisheries, we are rather partial to seals than otherwise; and we have often derived much amusement from watching a herd of them lying on the skerries. They must have many fine points in their character, for they manage to conciliate, in a wonderful degree, the affections of the gulls and terns, who officiate for them as sentinels, and seem really intent on giving them special warning of the approach of danger. These keep circling round the seals, screaming with all their might, as if to inform them that an enemy in a shooting-jacket is creeping up towards them behind the rocks; and seldom do the phocæ neglect the intimation. They wallop with a loud splash into the sea, their round bullet-heads not appearing again on the surface until they are safe from the reach of shot; while the gulls, having successfully executed their mission, keep sailing above your head, taunting you with a kind of hoarse, derisive laugh, and most certainly enjoying the spectacle of your disappointment.

Very interesting also is the solicitude with which these animals watch their young—an instinct which seems to be strongly developed in all marine creatures. The mother seal, when her young are killed, will not quit the place; and then the gunner, if hard of heart, may easily make her his prey. Sometimes young seals, from curiosity, will follow boats, and approach so near that it is possible to strike them with an oar. On such occasions, the mother, if near at hand, rises to the rescue, and carries off the unconscious offender, very much in the same way that an excited parent of the human race dashes into the street, to pick up her dirty darling who *will* persist in crossing before cart or coach.

Various are the modes resorted to for entrapping and destroying seals; but by far the most original plan that we have heard of, sprang from the fertile brain of Rory M'Nab, a fisherman and occasional poacher, whose habitation stood upon the banks of the Oikel. We give the tale as it was told to us, without pre-

tending to vouch for its authenticity. Rory was one of the race which has been thus characterised by a Highland minstrel—

> "Of all the Highland clans,
> M'Nab is most ferocious,
> Except the Macintyres,
> M'Craws, and Mackintoshes;"

but, after all, though hot in temper, he was no desperado, and was a very pleasant companion in a small still. Rory's circumstances were not supposed to be remarkably flourishing; but all at once he came out strong in the article of peltry, offering for sale as many sealskins as would have served to furnish winter-clothing for a company in the Crimea; and a revenue-officer who had occasion to search his house for the products of illicit distillation, was perfectly petrified to find that his barrels were overflowing with oil. Nobody in the district could say that he had seen Rory out shooting seals; but however he might come by them, the fact remained that he secured a far greater number than any six men in the district put together; and great was the marvel and curiosity as to his secret. Some opined that "the Queen of Phairie" had communicated to him a charm, by means of which he could tempt the creatures to follow him far away from shore, into a sequestered place, where they might be despatched at leisure. Others of less superstitious tendencies, who knew that Rory M'Nab was a capital performer upon the bagpipes, opined that he took advantage of the notorious fondness of seals for music, and beguiled them to their ruin, like the mysterious musician of Nuremberg, who first enticed the rats and then the children belonging to that city. But though speculation was rife, nothing could be known to a certainty; for Rory, with admirable discretion, preserved his own secret, and could not be brought to blab, even under the influence of usquebaugh.

The river Oikel expands into the estuary called the Firth of Dornoch, and a very valuable salmon-fishing is carried on there; consequently it is a favourite haunt of seals, who may be seen in considerable numbers upon the mudbanks left by the receding tide. One evening towards dusk, some fishermen were return-

ing in their boat from a station near Bonar Bridge, exceedingly incensed at the injury which they had just discovered to have been inflicted upon their nets by the seals. "The tefil is shoorely in the baistes!" said one of them, Angus M'Bane by name. "I will tell you what it is, you might have putten a stot through the hole that was in my nets; and it is not my believement that it was done by any ordinary sealgh. Pesides, and what is more, I have seen my own self something going about that is not canny; and you yourself, Lachlan M'Tavish, were witness to things whereof you can testify."

"And that shoorely I will do," replied the party thus appealed to; "for no later than yesterday was two days, I saw down there something that was not a sealgh, though it was fery hairy; and what do you think it was doing? May I never taste Glenlivet more, if the creature was not smoking a pipe!"

"And I will tell you morely," said another; "I would rather take than receive a plow from the baiste that has been leaving its marks on the mud for this last two weeks; for I looked at them as I went by, and saw the print of toe-nails as clearly as I see this tobacco. But yonder are the sealghs—filthy prutes!"

And undoubtedly there lay, upon a mudbank opposite, a large herd of these animals, apparently not at all inclined to move. Among them were some of great size, especially one, which, in the uncertain light of a September evening, looked positively enormous in bulk. It seemed of an amorous disposition, for it was sidling towards a group of females.

"I will make them get out of that, in a fery small expenditure of time!" said Angus M'Bane; and he lifted up his voice, and shouted, as did his comrades. Down rushed the seals precipitately to the water, as is the wont of those animals—all, save the monster, who, to the consternation and terror of the fishermen, reared himself bolt upright upon his tail, shook his clenched flipper at the boat, and spoke thus with a human voice:—

"A plack fushing and a pad harfest to you; and ill-luck upon your head, and on your fireside, and to all your undertakings, and female relations, you Angus M'Bane, son of Dugald M'Bane, blacksmith at the Meikle Ferry! And the same to you, Lachlan

M'Tavish, who do not know who your own father was, though your mother was Elspat M'Farlane, in Tomantoul! And the like to the rest of you down there, whom I shall descry as soon as I can perceive you! I'll tell you what it is—I will not submit to be molusted by such insucts; and if I should catch you again disturbing the panks, tefil take me if I do not give you some shots from a gun, which will be noways comfortable for your bodies!"

But ere the seal apparent had delivered himself of half of this defiance, Angus M'Bane and his comrades were a long way down the firth, making the boat spin through the water in the sheer ecstasy of their panic.

But after this encounter, notwithstanding the asseverations of the fishermen, who declared themselves ready to testify before the kirk-session that a seal had spoken to them (a marvel, after all, not much greater than Livy's stock omen, "*bos locutus est*"), Rory's secret oozed out; in fact, the story was so good that he could not keep it to himself, but disclosed it under a solemn oath of secrecy to Evan M'Kay, who, in like manner, communicated it to Donald Gunn. In consequence, not a week elapsed before every man, woman, and child in the district knew Rory M'Nab's method of dealing with the seals. It was ingenious in conception and was very cleverly carried into practice. Disguised as a seal, in a cunning garment of skins, Rory used, when the tide began to ebb, to lay himself down upon a sand-bank and imitate the grotesque motions of the creature. Unsuspicious of danger, the seals scramble up to their usual place of resort; and then Rory, taking care to avail himself of the wind, for the scenting power of these animals is nearly as acute as that of deer, crawled toward them, and stunned the nearest by a blow over the nose with a short bludgeon which he carried. In this way he was able to secure five or six seals for each tide; and, miraculous as it may appear, he was only once fired at by a sportsman. On that occasion Rory displayed great presence of mind, for the bullet struck within an inch or so of his whiskers. Most men, under such circumstances, would have made an attempt to disclose themselves; but Rory, not knowing, as he afterwards said, "but that the carle might have another parrel," thought it most

prudent to preserve his phocean character, took the water along with the herd, and reached the shore without discovery.

Such were the adventures of Rory M'Nab with the seals; and if any man doubts the veracity of the narrative, or the possibility of so beguiling them, let him purchase a sealskin and try. People have no right to be incredulous until they have convinced themselves, by personal experiment, of the impossibility of the thing stated; and so far as we are concerned, we should think ourselves guilty of an act of unpardonable impertinence, were we to express a doubt regarding the accuracy of any anecdote which a sportsman may be pleased to communicate. Indeed it is not safe to indulge in doubts, lest these should degenerate into positive scepticism; and the best method to deal with a sportsman who is recounting his own feats, is to take your tumbler quietly till his is exhausted, and then trump him if you can.

. . . . .

Yet another day, and the cottage which has been our headquarters for so many weeks will be deserted, and not again, this year at least, shall we, descending from the hill, see the blue smoke curling upwards in the hush of a summer's eve. Soon—very soon, must the flowers in the little garden be beaten down and withered in the rain, and the bonny bower be broken. No more, at early morning, shall we hear the crowing of the gorcock among the heather, or watch the herons winging their lazy flight to the promontory where they delight to dwell. Ever with the waning year is there a tinge of melancholy and regret; for the seasons glide away like shadows, and with them we hurry to our end.

Short but sweet is the northern summer; and after its delights have drawn to a close, sportsmen as well as birds begin to migrate, and turn their faces toward the south. The days have become perceptibly shorter, and almost every night there is a glare of aurora in the sky. The winds begin to pipe shrilly, and the seas to awaken from their summer calm; and gladsome of an evening is the flickering of the fire upon the hearth. Men are not yet prepared to settle down deliberately for the winter city life; but they are withdrawing themselves from the remote districts, and are beginning, like swallows or plovers, to congre-

gate. All over the Highlands, now once more gladdened by the presence of the Queen, there are gatherings and games; and loud and clamorous has been the strife of rival pipers at Inverness. Birmingham has had its musical festival, whereat Costa has won fresh laurels; and hospitable Glasgow has spread the board for upwards of a thousand philosophers. The heather is wellnigh deserted for the stubbles; and soon among the yellowing woods and coppices the whirring of the gorgeous pheasant will be followed by the deadly report.

And hark! over land and sea ring the thrilling news of victory. Sebastopol, that grim fortress of the Euxine, before whose bastions so many heroes have fought and died, has at length fallen, as a giant falls, after a desperate and sanguinary struggle; and the flags of Britain and France wave together in glory and amity above its ruins. As an aggressor and undisguised robber, Russia took the field; nor will she quit her scent of her intended prey until she has been driven, howling and crippled, to her den. Then let the bells ring, and the cannon thunder, and the bonfires be lighted on the hills; for the great fortress of Russia has fallen; and wall, town, and ships, are confounded in the common ruin!

NUPTIAL ODE ON THE MARRIAGE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES.

MARCH 1863.

I.

PASS from the earth, deep shadows of the night,
Give place and vantage to the rosy dawn;
For now the sullen Winter takes his flight,
His dreary robes withdrawn:
Coy as a maiden moves the wavering Spring
With dainty step across the emerald lawn,
Her tresses fair with primrose garland plight.
Hark! how the woods and bursting thickets ring
With the glad notes of love and welcoming;
The twitter of delight, the restless call
Of myriad birds that hold their festival,
When leaves begin to sprout and flowers to blow.
"O joyous time!" 'tis thus I hear them sing,
Each to its mate upon the burgeoning spray,—
"O happy time! Winter hath passed away,
Cold, rugged Winter, with its storms and snow,
And all the sadness of the shortened year.
Be glad—be glad! the pleasant days are near,
The days of mirth, and love, and joy supreme,
The long-expected days for which we pined!
Flow on, for ever flow, thou wandering stream,
Through tangled brakes, and thickets fast entwined
With the lithe woodbine, and the clambering rose!
For thee there is no rest;

But we shall build our nest
In some dim coppice where the violet blows;
And thou shalt sing to us the livelong night,
When hushed, and still, and folded in delight,
We pass from waking rapture to repose!"

II.

So,—while hoar Winter stumbles from the field,
Like some old tyrant, baffled and aghast,
Who, palsy-stricken, yet most loath to yield,
Points with malignant finger to the past,—
Lay we the sombre weeds of mourning by,
And hail the advent of the genial sun,
No longer overcast
By woeful clouds that with their curtain dun,
And evil-omened pall,
Made dark the year of our calamity.
O ruthless year! sad and unblest to all;
Most fraught with anguish to the heart of One,
Who evermore shall mourn,
Reft of her lord, her lover, and her stay!
In awe and silence veil that sacred urn,
Quit the dim vault, and pass into the day!
Not ours with impious plaint to censure doom,
Or murmur, when we rather need to pray.
"God called His servant home—His will be done!"
What more can mortals say?
Enough of tears are shed;
Unmeasured wailing desecrates the dead,
And vain repining but profanes the tomb!

III.

Yet let the Muse with trembling fingers try
To frame a verse for him so early lost.
Good deeds immortal are—they cannot die;
Unscathed by envious blight or withering frost

They live, and bud, and bloom; and men partake
Still of their freshness, and are strong thereby.
He who, inspired by charity and love,
Such deeds hath wrought, and for the Saviour's sake,
Hath endless glory in the realms above.
His place is now with that exalted host
Who, born to greatness, wasted not their power
In selfish luxury or idle boast,
But trod the path of wise humility.
Therefore assured already is his fame;
Therefore nor pyramid nor stately tower
Can add more honour to our ALBERT'S name.
High were his thoughts, and holy was his aim
To raise and bless the people of the land:
By peaceful arts to consecrate the toil
Of those who, labouring on our English soil,
Obey in patience GOD'S supreme command,
With that allegiance which becomes the free.
Then rest, embalmed for ever, noble heart,
By all our loves; for sainted though thou art,
Our fond remembrance still reverts to thee!

IV.

Oh, Royal Lady! honoured and most dear,
Whose bitter woe no human tongue can tell,—
For whom, while bending o'er that piteous bier,
From eyes unused to weep, the tear-drops fell!
For whom a nation's prayer went up to heaven—
For whom it yet arises night and day—
Deem not our sorrow cold nor insincere
For the high welcome given
On this auspicious morning to thy son,
Our hope, our darling Prince, our joy, our pride,
And to the blooming bride,
The fair young stranger he has wooed and won.

V.

Rejoice, brave England, through thy fertile plains,
Thy stately cities and ancestral halls,
Thy humbler homes where peace with plenty reigns,
Thy shores that, firmer far than massiest walls,
Defy the foeman and engird the free!
Old land of worship, loyalty, and fame,
Let every voice unite in glad acclaim
To swell the chorus of our jubilee!
Awake the echoes that have slumbered long,
Or answered faintly to another hail;
Awake them with the shout that, loud and strong,
Rang out from cliff to cliff when, sheathed in mail,
Victorious EDWARD trod the English shore,
Fresh from the wars in France, with nobler spoil
Than ever conquering captain home did bring.
Then myriad voices rose in glad turmoil—
"THE PRINCE! THE PRINCE!" they cried; and ever more
Swelled up the shout like ocean's gathering roar,
And burst in deluge of delirious joy;
The while, with modest grace, the hero-boy
Bare-headed rode beside the captive King!

VI.

But happier days have dawned upon us now:
No longer rings the clangour of the fight;
No more the balefire on the mountain brow
Sends up its ruddy signal to the night;
No huge Armadas vex the narrow seas,
No angry navies thunder on the tide;
But friendly ensigns flutter in the breeze,
And barks unchallenged o'er the waters glide.
We hailed our Prince, returning not from war
With blood-stained trophies wrenched from hostile hand;
His badge of triumph was the peaceful palm,

Fresh gathered from the Eastern emblem tree;
For he hath journeyed to the Holy Land,
And wandered o'er its blessed hills of balm;
Hath bent before the Saviour's tomb the knee,
Drank of the Jordan's stream, and seen afar,
In stillest night, when all was hushed and calm,
'Neath Syrian skies, the lustrous evening star
Shine in the dark expanse of Galilee.

VII.

Welcome wert thou, young pilgrim, to thy home,
But higher welcome England gives to-day;
For now the long-expected hour has come;
And, in its bright array,
Moves to the altar-steps the bridal train.
O happy, happy they—
That fond and loving pair!
The princely bridegroom and his peerless bride,
So beautiful and fair.
He, England's royal son and stateliest heir,
She, daughter of the far-descended Dane.
And now the knot is tied—
The marriage-vows are ta'en;
No longer are they twain,
And nought but death shall ever them divide!

VIII.

Blest be the hour! Proclaim it to the hills,
Let the loud cannon thunder forth our glee;
O'er mountains, rivers, plains, and rocks, and rills,
Speed the glad signal, speed it fast and free!
Behold! it leaps along with lightning glance,
Peal after peal in verberating roar,
From Dover rolling to the coast of France,
From Mona's isle to Erin's answering shore.
As starting swift from some oblivious trance,

Each fortress thunders, and each cliff replies;
Each lesser height prolongs the loud refrain.
Wide through the land the joyful message flies;
From where the hoary heap of Tintagell,
Great Arthur's hold, frowns o'er the western main,
To that huge buttress of the northern seas
Smote by the Pentland's swell,
Whence, dimly seen through tempest and through rain,
Loom far away the stormy Orcades.

IX.

Not silent wilt thou bide, impetuous Wales!
Old hero-land, whose name, so proudly borne
By that young Prince, rings o'er the world to-day.
Still glows the ancient fire within thy dales,
Still lives the magic of Llewellyn's lay;
Then, on this gracious morn,
Let the wild rapture of the harp be heard;
And bid the Cymric bard
His highest notes essay;
For never surely did a happier themé
Melt into music in a minstrel's dream.

X.

Loud as the rush of waters when the snow
Has left the summit of the mountains bare,
And the freed cataracts in thunder throw
The weight of winter through the quaking air,
Down to the gulfs that yawn and boil beneath—
So Scotland lifts her voice,
And with unbated breath
Bids all her sons rejoice.
Hearty and true the answer—Joy to thee,
Heir of the BRUCE, great joy! Our feast is spread:
Yet ah, we lack the ornament and head
That should have crowned the measure of our glee!

Take then our greeting; but the day will come
When we, with transport of tumultuous pride,
Shall welcome fondly to their northern home
Our princely chieftain and his blooming bride.
O quickly, quickly glide
On wings of love till then, celestial hours!
Swift be your flight; and when the summer spreads
Her carpet on the meads,
Strewn with the garniture of odorous flowers;
When glows with purple every mountain-side,
And the still lakes receive
In the vast mirror of their waters wide
The blush and glory of the crimson eve—
A louder, wilder cheer
Shall burst upon the ear,
And shouts of triumph herald to the sky,
The long exulting cry—
"Be joyful, ancient land, for Scotland's Prince is here!"

XI.

Come, Erin, come, and join the sister band!
Make the strong union of our loves complete;
Perfect as THEIRS, who, clasping hand to hand,
With guileless lips the sacred vows repeat;
And by that pledge so excellent and sweet
Bind kindred nations closer yet to stand.
Ring out the bells! Let every face be gay
To welcome this our royal holiday;
Be there no dull or lumpish laggarts here,
To vex our honest cheer,
But cast all care and dolorous thoughts away!
Begin the nuptial song;
The joyous strain prolong!
We'll drink, whate'er betide,
To bridegroom and to bride—
Fill high the cup, and let the health go round!
Then shout for joy amain—

Shout, till the rafters overhead resound,
For such a day as this ye shall not see again!

XII.

O happy times, when iron-visaged war
Like a maimed giant in his dungeon lies,
No more to urge along his creaking car
'Midst women's shrieks, and children's frighted cries!
O happy days, where peace and love combine
To rule the nations with benignant sway;
When prosperous planets ever nightly shine,
And hope awakens with the dawn of day!
Not such was England in the times of yore.
Back roll the years, as roll the clouds away—
And lo, the vision of a shelving shore!
Black ships are tossing on the surfy bay—
Thick on the strand the uncouth warriors swarm,
Stalwart and fierce, in terrible array—
See! in their van the grim Berserkars bear
The Raven banner flapping in the air—
They climb the cliffs! Arm, men of England, arm!
Rush to the fight, be resolute and bold!
No wandering pirates muster on the plain,
No puny foemen threat the Saxon hold—
Strike for your lives and homes! It is the conquering
Dane!

XIII.

Sons of the valiant dead!
Whose fathers Hengist led
What time the scattered Britons fled afar—
Vain is your boasted might;
Ye cannot win the fight,
Nor stem the torrent of that furious war.
The Danish sword hath cleft the Saxon shield,
And rank with slaughter is the trampled fen.
Few take to flight, and fewer yet will yield,

But none will strike for England's cause again.
Night settles down, and lo, the sky is red,
Gleaming from east to west with smothering fires;
The convents kindle, and the lofty spires
Of churches blaze; above the cloistered dead
Crash down the roofs, and many a fane expires!

XIV.

Then desolation lords it o'er the land;
Fell rapine stalks abroad; and who shall keep
The timorous flock, or brutal rage withstand,
When prowl the hungry wolves around the sheep?
Where is the shepherd—ALFRED, where is he?
Where hides the King in this disastrous hour?
Behold yon hut in lonely Athelney,
The haunt and refuge of the baited boor!
There lurks the Saxon monarch with the poor
In servile weeds, crouched by a squalid hearth;
Yet not forgetful of his royal birth,
And taught by stern misfortune to endure.
Again the trumpet sounds—the Saxons throng;
The Cross, dishonoured late, is reared on high;
And thousands, maddened by their country's wrong,
Swear the deep oath, to conquer or to die.
Ravens of Denmark! Does that boding cry
Predict a triumph or a foul defeat?
Dark sweep the clouds across an angry sky;
Dashes the rain, and pelts the blinding sleet;
The thunder bellows, and the lightning glares,
But aye the bickering blade
Cleaves the strong helm, and through the corslet shares,
The Danesman's march is stayed—
Stayed! Call ye that a stay? The staggering host,
Like their own ships by screaming tempest tost,
Waver and break—Make in! the day's our own!
Again night settles on the fated field—
The Saxon sword is red,

Hewn is the Danish shield.
The Cross triumphant waves above his head,
And English ALFRED hath his kingdom won!

XV.

Depart, ye shadows of the olden time!
Faint as the forms in weird Agrippa's glass,
Evoked from Hades by enchanted rhyme,
Like vapour melting into air, they pass.
No dark fantastic vision of the night
Now casts its glamour o'er the gazer's eye.
Fair as a poet's dream, serenely bright,
Veiled in the charm of maiden modesty,
The Rose of Denmark comes, the Royal Bride!
O loveliest Rose! our paragon and pride,
Choice of the Prince whom England holds so dear—
What homage shall we pay
To one who has no peer?
What can the bard or wildered minstrel say
More than the peasant, who, on bended knee,
Breathes from his heart an earnest prayer for thee?
Words are not fair, if that they would express
Is fairer still; so lovers in dismay
Stand all abashed before that loveliness
They worship most, but find no words to pray.
Too sweet for incense! Take our loves instead,
Most freely, truly, and devoutly given;
Our prayers for blessings on that gentle head,
For earthly happiness and rest in Heaven!
May never sorrow dim those dovelike eyes,
But peace as pure as reigned in Paradise,
Calm and untainted on creation's eve,
Attend thee still! May holy angels keep
Watch o'er thy path, and guard thee in thy sleep!
Long years of joy and mutual love be thine,
And all that mortals ask or can receive
Of benediction from the Hand Divine!

XVI.

Most happy Prince! who such a priceless gem
Hast set within thy royal diadem;
Heir of illustrious kings, what words can tell
The joy that fills the nation's heart this day!
If the fond wish of those who love thee well
Could call down blessings; as the bounteous May
Showers blossom on the turf—as ocean spray
Flies glittering o'er the rocks—as summer rain
Falls sweetly soft on some sequestered dell,
Bidding the languid herb revive again—
Then never surely Prince were blest like thee!
For in thy gentle nature well we see
The manhood, worth, and valour of thy sires,
Tempered with such a winsome nobleness
(The glow without the rage of bickering fires),
That shame it were and sin to love thee less.
And though no human hand can lift the veil
Of the dark future, or unfold the page
Of that most awful book, wherein the tale,
To be accomplished, of the coming age
Stands in eternal characters of doom—
Though no prophetic voices from the tomb,
Or mystic oracles of dim presage,
Can tell us what shall be—our trust is high,
Yea, in the Highest! He will be thy shield,
Thy strength, thy stay, though all the world combine.
Believing this, we fear no enemy:
Nor foreign war, nor treason unrevealed,
Can shake thy house, or mar thy royal line:
Dread none, great Prince; our hearts and loves are thine!

XVII.

Cease then, my strain! too weak, perchance, and rude,
To be the descant on a theme so sweet;
A sorry tribute, though the will be good,

This day of highest festival to greet,
When Youth and Beauty at the altar meet,
And all the land is ringing with acclaim.
Unequal as thou art and incomplete,
What haughty tongue shall censure thee or blame,
Since lowliest gifts with richest offerings vie?
Cease and be done! For lo, the western sky
Is purpling down to darkness, and the glare
Of myriad lamps is flashing in the air,
And on the distant hills the bonfires blaze.
Swift stars rush upwards with a fiery train,
Dispersed in clusters of effulgent rays,
And meteors bursting into golden rain.
So gleams the startled firmament: but soon
Supreme in heaven shall glide the tranquil moon,
All meaner fires eclipsed. On plain and hill
She sheds her peaceful light—
Hushed be each irksome noise; let all be still;
And holiest silence seal the marriage night!

THE END.

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